

JOHN ASKEW
THE
STANHOPE
VIOLIN
MAKER



By

WILLIAM MORLEY EGGLESTONE

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JOHN ASKEW,
VIOLIN-MAKER, 1834—1895.

John Askew, . THE . Stanhope Violin-Maker.

WITH NOTES ON
THE COMING OF THE VIOLIN,
THE FIDDLE IN THE NORTH, &c., &c.



- BY - -

WILLIAM MORLEY EGGLESTONE,

Author of "Weardale Names,"
"Stanhope Memorials of Bishop Butler,"
"Letters of a Weardale Soldier," "Picturesque Weardale," &c., &c.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF MEDAL VIOLINS, &c.

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JOHN ASKEW, THE
STANHOPE VIOLIN-MAKER.

PREFACE.

The writer of this little book is of the opinion that any person shewing special skill, perseverance, and ability in any branch of craft industry, demands a biographer to preserve and hand down to posterity his life-picture, to show that he was worthy of his native place and of his country, if only in a small way. This has been the object of the author in gathering together the particulars set forth in the following pages. Mr. John Askew, in the whirl of his eventful career, found his idea—violin-making—and under many difficulties faithfully and successfully pursued it inasmuch as he was awarded diplomas at exhibitions for his own work and thus to some extent realised the “dream of his life.” To weave into the life-story some historical matter relating to the beautiful instrument, the violin, it has been necessary to consult well known works, especially to the following has the author been greatly indebted—*Antonio Stradivari*, by W. Henry Hill, Arthur F. Hill, F.S.A., and Alfred E. Hill, 1909. *British Violin-Makers*, by Rev. W. Meredith Morris, B.A. 1904. *Old Violins*, by H. R. Haweis 1910. *The Violin : its Famous Makers and their Imitators*, by George Hart, 1909. *The Violin and its Story*, by Hyacinth Abele, Trans. by Geoffrey Alwyn, 1905. *The Scottish Violin-Makers*, by Wm. C. Honeyman, 1910, and Novello's *Dictionary of Musicians*, and *Dictionary of Violin-Makers*, The author's thanks are due to Mrs. Albert McCallum, daughter of the late Mr. John Askew for the loan of Bronze Medal, Diplomas and letters; many friends who knew the Stanhope Violin-Maker have willingly contributed information as mentioned in the following pages.

W. M. EGGLESTONE.

Stanhope, Co. Durham, 1914.

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ERRATA:

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- 65 Plate "Hildyard" Violin, for date 1885 read 1883
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John Askew—Violin Maker.

Chap. I.

EARLY DAYS AND THE GREY BULL INN.

THE surname "Askew" is not common in Weardale but we find it in several other parts in the North of England. Curiously enough we find the very name "John Askew" printed in the pages of Vol. 9 of the Surtees Society publications, four hundred and fifty seven years ago. An affectionate request was made to the Monastery and to which the following answer was given :—

"We absolve the soul of your father, and our dear friend Johannis Askewe (John Askew) and our full chapter we bestow the acceptable benefit of absolution." 1456.

A brass plate in the south wall of the north transcript in the Church of St. John the Baptist, Newcastle-on-Tyne, has the

following inscription—"Beneath is the burial place of the Family of Askew of Redheugh."

At Balton-le-Dale, Michael Askew of Moorton was buried the 3rd of December, 1742, and Ann Askew of the same place on the 20th of January, 1755. At Corbridge, Thomas, first son of James Turnbull, Dilston, native of Simon Burn, by his wife Elizabeth Askew, native of the parish of Allendale, was born the 29th of June, 1811. At the same place John Nicholson and Jane Askew, Corbridge, were married in December, 1803.

At Stanhope, Jonathan Askew and Jane Milburn were married in August, 1743. A George Askew was witness to the marriage of William Barron, of the parish of Blanchland, and Mary Walton of Stanhope, in July, 1786.

In the Stanhope registers we find the following :—George Askew, bap. 13th Nov., 1825, and who died in 1865, aged 39 years, was the son of George Askew, cordwainer,* and his wife Elizabeth of Stanhope, George

*CORDWAINER, which means shoemaker, is a naturalised form of French Cordonnier, one who works in cordways or Spanish leather,

the cordwainer, a local ratepayer in 1828, kept the Grey Bull Inn, and died in 1852, aged 53 years. His family by his second wife Mary, were :—

Joseph Askew, born 1832, Jane, Martha, and John Askew (Violin Maker), bap. April 6th, 1834.

John married Catherine Dalkin of Teesdale, and they 'had issue, Robert, born 1859, who died 1885, aged 26 years and a daughter who married Mr. Albert McCallum, of Stanhope: His son Robert was a volunteer, and a good shot, and he left a son, John James, grandson of the violin maker. A Mary Askew died in 1847.



“Grey Bull Inn,” where John Askew
was born,

Young Askew who became a successful violin maker was educated at the Stanhope Barrington Schools, and, as one of his old musical friends said, his education was quite ordinary. These schools were provided by Bishop Barrington, Bishop of Durham, and were endowed with others in the dale in the year, 1823. In early days it was customary in Stanhope for boys to be bound apprentices to some trade, as weaver, tailor, etc. Our young man was beginning to learn the trade of his father, that of cordwainer or shoemaker at the shop attached to the old Grey Bull Inn.

This building the old Grey Bull could tell many a good story and many a romance of olden times. The Inn is situated at the west end of Stanhope, practically at cross roads. The front faces the old Logley Hill road or turnpike on the south side, a road forming the main road westward through Weardale to Alston and eastward to Wolsingham, Bishop Auckland, and Durham. The road on the north side of the Inn takes the traveller to Derwent, Blanchland and Newcastle. A white board at the gable end of the Grey Bull was painted in black

letters "27 miles to Newcastle," in the days of Newcastle carriers and packhorses. The south, often spoke of as the drift road or cross road, goes by Softley to Teesdale, and was much in use by cattle and sheep drovers when coming from the north of England and Scotland. As the drivers of cattle and sheep reached the fell gate on their southward journey they found a notice stuck on to a tree to the effect that drovers who wished to graze and rest their stock on Bollihope Common could do so on applying to Thomas Sanderson of Thimbleby Hill, who would "grant leave and receive payment at 4/- per score of cattle and 4/- per hundred sheep."

No doubt many of the Scottish and Border drovers and packhorse drivers would hark back to taste the brewing of ale at the Grey Bull and the noted "Bull" whisky, as they re-told the daring events of the moss-troopers from the Tyne.

The Borderland was rich in adventure of the "long-pack" kind and the Raid into Rookhope would have its place in the stories and most likely the local men, before our fiddle-maker was born, would discuss the Penninsular War, and the gallant death of

young Brumwell of Warden Hill.

Then we have the story of the Newcastle butchers, who, when St. Nicholas's clock struck the mid-night hour, headed together and walked to Weardale to buy calves, as veal was a popular dish in those days. When the butchers arrived at about seven in the morning and had bought their calves they got them wrapped up in pack-sheets and the local drivers of the packhorses or carrier galloways, strapped the live stock on to the pack-saddles and departed for Newcastle. On the return journey they brought coals and wood for the lead mines.

The shoemaker's shop was situated at the east end of the block of buildings. Here we had the "Bull" kitchen where travellers mainly visited, and the shoemaker's shop where generally the local citizens, old and young, congregated, and young Askew would no doubt hear the old hands discuss the Crimean War and fight their battles over again. When the Newcastle carrier's cart approached the town each week with the newspaper, he stuck a red flag on the top of his carrier's cart if the English had gained a victory, and then the newspaper was read and

the battles discussed, and no doubt criticisms followed.

By the time young Askew had gone through his apprenticeship and got fully into his work he was considered to be an expert at his trade. Those who knew him and had dealings with him in after years, and speaking from personal knowledge, do not hesitate to say that as a shoemaker he was an all-round first class craftsman. Hammering leather on a whinstone lapstone and stitching soles onto the uppers was, however, a somewhat monotonous employment, consequently our young shoemaker, searching for out-door exercise, became an angler, and fishing for spotted trout in the river Wear became a long-practiced spare-time hobby. As might be expected he became an expert with the rod and line, made all his own tackle, and it is said that his home-made artificial flies were so natural that our angler sometimes hooked swallows instead of fishes.*

*It was told to the writer as a true story that John Askew whilst fly-fishing in the river Wear near Buddy Holm Bridge, that his line was caught in some tree branches and one of his flies broke off and was left in the tree. He put on another fly and fished away down-stream another half-mile to Frosterley, and then returned, and on reaching Buddy Holm on his homeward journey he saw a swallow dangling at the end of the hair line hanging from the tree branch. The swallow when taken down was found to have the artificial fly in its mouth.

A Gentleman in office when located in Stanhope in early Askew days used to tell a fishing story somewhat against himself, to the effect that he invited Askew to a day's fishing in the Derwent, and he drove his guest over the fell to Edmondbyers. The day was fine for the anglers, and at the close of a hard day's work they joined each other; the gentleman displayed an empty pannier whilst to his surprise Askew turned up with quite a good catch. As all the fishers in Stanhope knew that the "two-some" were having a day whipping in the Derwent, the gent queried what the Stanhope Anglers would say on their return with an empty pannier and a full one, so Askew took the hint and shared the spoil.

Stanhope lies at the foot of the northern bank of the river Wear and quite close to it so the stream tempted many to go whip its water, and then the tributary burns below and above Stanhope were inviting. It was a pleasure fishing with the rod along the Wear. There were many stretches of beautiful scenery for instance from the west end of the town to the old stone bridge which is built on solid whinstone or basalt. It was from this rock



STANHOPE SAXHORN BAND, 1860.

The members on the picture reading from left to right are (1) John Maddison, (2) John Sanderson, (3) James Benson, (4) Wm. Tweddle, (5) Joseph Raine, (6) John Atkinson, (7) John Hogarth, (8) Wm. Bean, (9) John Askew x, (10) Thomas Walton, (11) Ralph Walton, (12) J. Elliott.

that came the cobbler's lapstone.*

As previously mentioned the shoemaker's shop at the Grey Bull during the fifties and sixties was a rendezvous for nearly all the young men in the town. When there was a lack of news they played fox and geese, but the draught-board had the greatest attraction. Many were quite expert hands at draughts, Askew being amongst the list. The members of the Saxhorn Band were frequenters to the shop, our young shoemaker being a member. John Atkinson, who was leader of the band, William Atkinson, John Walton, of the Phoenix Inn and a number of other companions and band members discussed current topics and played draughts among leather and derelict boots and shoes.

John Askew was a good musician and a player in the Saxhorn Band, when in 1860 it visited the Crystal Palace and won a prize. As the life of our young shoemaker and musician in those days was closely associated with the local band and the local volunteer

*From Dutch lappen, to cobble or patch, lapper, a cobbler, lap work is cobblery. The word is not from the stone being laid on the cobbler's lap.

force which was formed in 1860, some particulars of those two institutions will be given in the next chapter.



✓ John Askew fishing in the river Wear.

*Chapter II.**STANHOPE SAXHORN BAND.*

In the early part of the year 1824, Mr. Joseph Fettes, a well-known clarinet player in the north, formed a small band of musicians and named it the Peat Hill Band, and which was supposed to be the first band formed in the dale. Fettes belonged to, and was, a native of Hexham, and by trade was a mill-wright, and fortunately became a pupil of Mr. Gibson, then teacher of the Northumberland Militia Band. Our Hexham mill-wright was at this time engaged under the London Lead Co., to manage a pressure engine at their lead mines in Middlehope burn not far from the village of Westgate. Shortly afterwards Fettes came to reside at Stanhope and under the patronage of the London Lead Co.'s chief Agent, Mr. Joseph Little, the mill-wright formed a band at Stanhope. The first meeting of the newly formed Stanhope Saxhorn Band was held on the 29th day of May, 1824, and their instruments were principally of wood except the bugle, trumpet, French horn, and

trombone. After a few years several other brass instruments were introduced and considerable progress was made.

A local Diary mentions marriages at Stanhope Church in 1829, 1832, and 1842 at which the local band was present and in the record of John Bell's death of the White Lion Inn in 1852, it is mentioned that he was one who helped to establish the local band. Before the musical contests were established at the Crystal Palace this band had become locally famous and on the recommendation of their conductor, Mr. DeLacy they ventured to enter the list at the Crystal Palace, London. On the 10th of July, 1860, no less than 115 brass bands played at the Palace Contests.

Mr. Copeland, the only member of the old local band now living informed the writer in February, 1913, that he was one of the bandsmen who went to London in 1860, at which time he was only a youth, and says—"amongst the 40 bands which competed at the International Band Contest at the Crystal Palace we won the 5th prize."

Fortunately the writer has procured a splendid photograph of the old band taken by Wigglesworth Brothers, who at that period

stayed at Stanhope and St. John's Chapel several months. The Wigglesworths exhibited, at the time, a very attractive panorama shewing various moving figures, and during the day took photographs of the positive kind, and these were remarkable for their clearness and finish. This band photograph we have reproduced in these pages. The Members of the band not shewn on the photograph were R. DeLacy, George Pattison, J. Kitchen, George Walton, and Donald Copeland.

Mr. Copeland, who was with the band at the Crystal Palace, 1860, was then about 16 years of age and played the 3rd cornet, and he well remembers the 3,000 Orpheonistes (French musical amateurs) performing choral music, and the Imperial band of Guides performing. These events took place on the 25th and 26th of June, 1860. The great day was when the 115 brass bands played as previously mentioned.

The Stanhope Saxhorn Band at this time consisted of the following members :—

R. DeLacy, Teacher	...	Soprano
John Askew	...	2nd Alto Saxhorn
John Atkinson, Leader		1st Cornet

Saxhorn Band.

James Benson	...	Repiano Cornet
William Bean	...	Alto-Trombone
Joseph Collingwood	...	2nd Euphonium
Donald Copeland	...	3rd Cornet
John Elliott	...	1st Double Bass
John Hogarth	...	1st Alto Saxhorn
John Kitchen	...	2nd Double Bass
John Maddison	...	Trumpet
George Page	...	3rd Cornet
George Pattison	...	Bass Trombone
Joseph Raine	...	Cornet
John Sanderson	...	2nd Cornet
Wm. Twedde	...	Cornet
George Walton	...	Tenor Trombone
Ralph Walton	...	1st Euphonium
Thomas Walton	...	Baritone

Evidently the band got into low water as we find that in 1881 it was re-established, and by subscriptions from the inhabitants of Stanhope, several valuable instruments were purchased from Mr. Hoggett of Darlington. Mr. Ralph Walton, the noted Euphonium player, was elected teacher, Mr. C. F. Tinkler cornet player leader, Mr. John Maddison, an old bandsman, Treasurer, and the writer,

was appointed Secretary. Later a handsome baton was presented to the Instructor, Mr. Ralph Walton. It is not necessary for our purpose to follow the history of the band further, but it may be mentioned that the Stanhope Saxhorn band exists to-day and the leader is Mr. Wm. Walton, son of the Ralph Walton mentioned above.

THE STANHOPE VOLUNTEERS.

Concurrently with the popularity of the band in 1860 a volunteer force was established in the town in this year and, as might have been expected, quite a number of young men joined the force and John Askew was one of them.

He frequently left his cobbler's bench but not always to go a-fishing as he might have been seen at the entrance to the Dene practising with his shot gun at pieces of paper he had stuck up on the trunks of trees. These pieces of paper were square and he used to calculate the number of shot pellets he could put into a surface of so many square inches according to the distance the target was from the gun. He was a ready made rifle

shot and consequently joined the force when he was about 26 years of age.

Volunteers were enrolled in England in 1778 in consequence of the American War and the threatened invasion of France in 1793. In October, 1803 King George the Third reviewed 21,400 London Volunteers, and two days later 14,676. In June, 1804, the English Volunteers numbered 341,600. In May, 1859, in consequence of the fear of a French invasion a great movement was made in the formation of Volunteer Corps of riflemen and by 1860 many thousands were enrolled in various parts of England, and this force was considered at the time the strongest defence of England. In this year 18,450 volunteers were reviewed in Hyde Park, 20,000 were reviewed in Edinburgh by the Queen, 14,000 in Lancashire and in 1861 the volunteers in Britain were 160,000 strong.

The Stanhope 20th Durham Rifle Volunteers as part of the movement were established in 1860. The late John Joseph Roddam, of Newtown, Stanhope, was their first Captain and held office up to part of the year 1872, when he was succeeded by his son the late John Watson Roddam.

Private Askew the subject of these pages was considered one of the best shots in the Corps, and won many prizes at the Crawley rifle range. The writer has no record of the early years of the Stanhope Riflemen, but is able, from a local diary, to give some of the results of the volunteers annual competition from and including 1874.

In a diary kept by the late Anthony Smith we get some side lights respecting this institution.

On May 25th, 1874, we find—"On retiring from the 20th Durham Rifle Volunteers of which I was a volunteer from 1860, the year of the foundation of the volunteer force in Great Britain, I returned my belt, helmet, rifle, sword-bayonet and instruction books—the field exercise and rifle exercise—into the store and with which one had to make oneself pretty well acquainted before one could obtain a Sergt.'s certificate of efficiency. The corps is in a fair state of efficiency at the present time, and very strong being nearly 70 men. I hope it will continue so for many years to come. I was rather grieved on leaving the corps, it being a thing I much fancied being a volunteer, but

age will have to give way to youth ; one cannot always be young and a volunteer."

On the 19th of September in the same year 1874 the 20th Durham Rifles held their annual competition on the rifle range on East Crawley. The competition being at 200 and 400 yards, five shots at each distance when Private John Askew shewed his skill in the use of the rifle by coming to the front again and obtaining the first prize with a score of 31 points—12 at 200 yards and 19 at 400 yards. Askew also won the hat given to the man who made the most bull's eyes. This was the 14th annual competition, but the writer has no previous record of competitions but evidently Askew won the first prize in 1873.

1875, 2nd October, the 20th Durham Rifles held their annual competition at their range on Stanhope Common. They had been favoured with the gift of a Silver Cup from an unknown hand some weeks before, and it was to become the property of any competitor winning it two years in succession ; this was the condition under which the donor wished it to be competed for.

The competition commenced between 12 and 1 p.m. The ranges being 200 and 400

yards, 5 shots each range. Captain Roddam not being at home the competition was conducted under the superintendence of the of the Adjutant of the battalion and Lieut. Plowdon of the 43rd Light Infantry. The arrangements for the division of the prizes being, that if any man obtained 12 points he would get money for the whole number of points obtained, but if he only got 11 points he got nothing, three range prizes at each distance and three aggregate prizes were given. A new hat for the man who made the most bull's eyes was given. Private Lonsdale won the first prize, the Cup, the greatest aggregate prize, the first range prize at 400 yards and the hat with the greatest number of bull's eyes, with a score of 34 points, Sergt. Golightly 2nd with 32 points, Private John Askew 3rd with 31 points, Corporal Iley 4th with 30 points, etc.

The Company partook of a substantial dinner provided for them at Mr. Fenwick's, Queen's Head Inn, under the superintendence of Lieut. Plowden. This was the 15th annual competition.

October 6th, 1877, the 20th Durham Rifles held their annual competition on their

range on Stanhope Common. The first prize was taken by Private John Askew with 35 points, the 2nd by Private Wm. Sanderson with 32 points, and the 3rd by Private J. Gibson with 31 points.

October 5th, 1875 at this annual competition Private Robert Askew, son of the above John Askew won first prize and the cup with 34 points, Private Joseph Gibson second with 34 points, and Privates John Bainbridge and Joseph Thompson had each 33 points.

Mr. Askew was also often very successful at the battalion shooting held annually on the Bishop Auckland Rifle range. The writer has been informed that he won the battalion shooting five years in succession, and the late Col. Sergt. W. Atkinson of Stanhope was second to him every time.

In those days private John Askew was well known in the north of England as a skilful rifle shot.

*Chapter III.**THE COMING VIOLIN MAKER.*

It was only in his younger days that John Askew was associated with the Grey Bull Inn. The landlord of this Public House was his half-brother George, and after George's death it was kept by his widow. The coming fiddle maker lived in a house at Butts Head in the Market Place, and then at Albert Cottage at the east end of the town, then at Bond Isle Terrace and at High Street, Bainbridge's Building, and lastly to the house opposite the Queen's Head Inn, now occupied by Mr. Indian, shoemaker, who served his time with our violin maker.

The principal associates of Askew during his early studies of the violin, were James Benson, John Maddison, John Hogarth, Thomas and Ralph Walton and other bandsmen, and the band instructor the late R. DeLacy, then of Sunderland, afterwards of London, and the late Thomas Wood, Military Instrument maker of Newcastle-on-Tyne. James Benson, schoolmaster was his greatest local friend. He was the older man by a few

years and keen on making of violins, and, moreover, he was an excellent violinist, and in every way an accomplished musician who had many pupils and was teacher of local and other String bands. Probably Benson's enthusiasm induced Askew to study the violin and then to attempt the making of the instrument he began to worship.

The schoolmaster was a linguist so far at least that he knew French, and amongst his books he had Vuillaume's works on "Antonio Stradivari," published in Paris in 1856. He read out passages and explained them to Askew and in fact the two collaborated almost night and day on the question of violin making. These two violin makers were good musicians. Askew, however, was not expert on the violin but became a more expert fiddle maker than the schoolmaster.

They studied together their pet instrument and made copies together. Benson, who died before his friend's success in London in 1885, used to play with the late Joseph Roddam, son of the late Jonathan Roddam of Newhouse, Weardale, who was chief Agent for the Beaumont Lead Mines. The writer well remembers seeing and hearing these two

smart performers Benson and Roddam on their choice instruments the violin.

Askew studied Hart's book on the violin and evidence shews that it was a well read book. The older people of Stanhope who knew the schoolmaster and his friend Askew remember seeing them handling and turning over a neck, scroll, or belly to see if they were correct and then scraping and cutting a few seconds and then the pieces of wood were subject to the eye to see if they were symetrical and true.

Askew in his early days of fiddle making had moderate tools and his shoemaker's shop was his workshop, yet by feeling with his hands and using his eyes, his pocket or cobbling knife or a sharp razor he shaped up the various parts of the instrument he was making with considerable accuracy. It was a labour of love, and he was a born genius hence the excellency of his work. When genius was there what matter about tools. We have it said by a well known London violin maker that a genius could make a fiddle with his knife and fork.

Our Stanhope violin maker like the Cremonese makers was particular about the

wood he used for his fiddles. It is said that he got some old pine wood from the old Stanhope Church when restored in 1867. The writer has been informed that Benson, the schoolmaster secured some of this pine from the old Church. Probably the schoolmaster and his friend would both get supplies.

Askew was probably not making fiddles at this date and if the schoolmaster preserved this wood he would willingly let his friend have it. As St. Thomas Church dates from the year 1200, was restored in 1663, then had galleries erected in the tower in 1743, the timber would be well seasoned.

Two of the galleries were taken down by Rector Darnel, 1831-1864, and the last remaining gallery was removed in 1867 in Canon Clayton's time. The pine wood cut from the old pine baulks forming the galleries would be at least one hundred and twenty five years old, and probably more when it found its way into an Askew violin.

One of Askew's instruments was bought by Mr. G. R. Moor of Westgate who frequently visited his shop and had talks with the maker. On one occasion the shoemaker pointing from his seat to a block of sycamore

wood standing in a corner told his visitor that the back of his fiddle was cut from that block. This wood came from Newlandside estate on the south side of the river Wear opposite Stanhope. When he made the bronze medal violin in 1883 the maker told its present owner, Miss Hildyard, that the wood cost five pounds, and was probably got from London. If the violin made in the year following was made of the same wood the writer must say that it is charmingly beautiful. In 1893 our fiddle maker had an order from Mr. Towry Piper to make him a copy of a "Long Strad" the buyer provided the "Strad" to copy from and the wood, and being an expert the wood would be of the right kind, and he also provided our maker with a set of proper violin making tools. The Long Strad turned out well and will be referred to later.

In respect to wood used by the Craft Mr. Morris tells us in his "British Violin Makers" that John Macintosh of Galston, N.B., who made several violins and decorated them on the back with portraits and landscapes says—
"One of these is made throughout of oak which was taken from the roof of the old

Castle at Mauchline, said to be the house wherein Robert Burns was married to his "Bonnie Jean." When the Burn Memorial Museum at Mauchline was opened, the violin was presented to the promoters and gladly accepted by them as a relic worthy of a place in an institute founded in honour of the immortal poet." (p. 169)

The same author referring to William Glenister, London, violin maker informs us that "Some of Mr. Glenister's best pine has been obtained from an old house in Beak Street, and although it is old and well past the age at which shrinking may be supposed to cease he still leaves his plates thick and solid." Mr. Morris says, however (p. 132) "The right sort of timber, cut at the right time of the year, and naturally seasoned in blocks for about twenty years is what is required."

Messrs. Hill in their book on "Antonio Stradivari" have something to say about wood as follows :—

"We may here add a word as to the delusion that material taken from buildings, such as for instance Swiss Chalets—in some cases centuries old is preferable to that

cut and seasoned during a lesser, but still a sufficient number of years, we have tried both kinds, Vuillaume did so repeatedly—and we fail to find that the former possesses any real advantage over the latter; in fact, our opinion is rather in favour of the more youthful wood” (p. 173).

Mr. W. C. Honeyman in his excellent little book, “Scottish Violin Makers” in giving a biographical account of the “Scottish Stradivari,” Matthew Hardie, violin-maker (1755—1826) mentions an interesting story of how Hardie made his “hidden violin.”

“Hardie was one day, in the year 1821, walking past a field on the Cramond Road when he noticed a weather-beaten pailing slab lying on the ground, and picking it up and noticing its lightness, he balanced it on his finger, and struck it with a stone to test its tone, “what a splendid fiddle breast this will make” he remarked to his companion. Carrying the slab under his arm he presently stopped at a farm house for a glass of milk, and, being invited into the kitchen to drink it, soon noticed a very old baking board of maple propped on the dresser, which he examined with the most eager interest. “I

see, mistress, ye have a fine fiddle here," he remarked to the woman of the house. "A fiddle!" she replied in astonishment, "There never was sic a thing in the house." "Oh yes, there is, but its well hidden; yet I want to buy it," answered Hardie. "If ye can find a fiddle in this house your welcome to it for nothing" answered the woman. Hardie, taking up the old board said--"Thank ye, mam, its inside this baking board and wearing to get out, so I'll take ye at your word. The breast o' her is here," and he shewed the old pailing slab. Next day he sent out a brand new baking board to the good wife, which highly delighted her, and in due time the hidden fiddle was cut from its covering, and proved to be one of his finest instruments."

William Heaton of Gomersall, near Leeds, a well known violin maker who was born 1827, "the backs of the last six fiddles have been taken from a maple plank which was seasoned in the Gomersall Church Bell Tower and the instruments have been christened the "Tower" fiddles. Mr. Heaton has made one fiddle which he calls the "Gouge." It derives its name from the fact that it has been entirely finished, both inside and outside,

with the gouge, neither sand paper nor the file having touched the wood (Morris p. 154).

All fiddle makers were also particular as to the kind of varnish they used. The founders of the school of violin makers at Cremona, the Amati family, Guarneri, Antonio Stradivari, Carlo Bergonzi and other followers paid considerable attention to the varnish used on their instruments. Askew it is said, by those who knew him, to have studied the varnish question for twenty years and he used to put it on with his fingers using if necessary the palm of his hand.

Our fiddle maker's early instruments were subject to a varnish known as "Askews" and it was a dead reddish colour. It is said that the recipe is lost and that he told his people that it was a trade secret. We find elsewhere that he got his varnish from an Italian book and that the schoolmaster and he used to mix it ready for use. The Cremonese varnish is said to be lost but it appears to have been well known and in general use, and mixed by pupils. In respect to varnish the Brothers Hill, after mentioning that the varnish has considerable influence respecting the tone of an instrument, say—"We think it

is not sufficiently known or recognised that in a great measure Stradivari instruments owe to it their distinguished quality of tone ; in reality the future of any perfectly constructed instrument is determined by the coat it is clothed in." And further, that " the varnish employed by Stradivari is still in existence." Hart, however, is of opinion that the Cremonese varnish remains a secret lost to the world.

Whatever the varnish is composed of there must be something due to the Artist who puts it on to the instrument.

In later years of his violin making Askew probably changed his varnish, He was an experimenter, and probably other varnishes were used. The four violins exhibited at the Jubilee Exhibition at Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1887 were entered as being oil-varnished and of entirely his own workmanship. On this point we have an opinion from a person who is a well known violinist and a collector to the extent of 30 or 40 instruments.

Mr. Clarkson Close who informs the writer that a violin dated 1879 is quite a nice well made one with Askews own varnish on whilst the violin he has and made by Askew in 1893 is very different in character and

appears to have been varnished with Whitelaw's varnish. Whitelaw's varnish, was discovered in a very odd way as described in Mr. W. C. Honeyman's book on "Scottish Violin Makers," p. 98, and is quoted in Mr. M. Morris's book on "British Violin Makers" p. 228.

It was put on the market in 1888 and is called Cremona Amber Oil Varnish. Askew's exhibition violins in 1885 and 1887 appear to have been oil-varnished but the violins after 1888 might have Whitelaw's varnish. This varnish is highly spoken of, and Askew would not miss the opportunity if he considered it better than his own.

To attempt to copy the great Master Antonio Stradivari, our local fiddle maker must have had a good heart, but such was his perseverance and belief in his own ability that he kept to his work and such was his success that he won Diplomas at Exhibitions. One of the old bandsmen who knew his brother bandsman well, informed the writer in a letter at the beginning of the year 1913 that Askew succeeded so well with his work that "he decided to send some of his violins to South Kensington International Exhibition

(1885) with which he won first prize for Great Britain and third prize for the world, being only beaten by an Italian and a Frenchman."

We must consider that the subject of this memoir had only a village school education, and he had no training except at his own trade that of a shoemaker, yet we find that everything he touched with his master hand shewed the best of workmanship.

No one but a born genius could have done this. His boots and shoes were of the best workmanship. His angling tackle were works of art, and his results as a local volunteer shewed in his record of bull's eyes the accuracy of his eye. Then he was a good musician as one of the old Saxhorn band. One of the writer's correspondents, an expert violinist who knew Askew and has one of his instruments, put the matter probably in a true light in saying :—

"Anyhow John Askew was naturally gifted and had he been put in Hill's workshop when he was young he would perhaps have become the finest English maker."*

* The name Hill refers to the well known Messrs. Wm. E. Hill and Sons, Bond Street, London.

As to the light touch of the Stanhope genius it is related that a local violin player had broken the neck of his instrument, so he sent it to a joiner at Westgate thinking that a joiner was the proper person to send it to. The joiner of course sent the broken fiddle to Askew who spliced the neck, and when it was returned to the owner no one could ever find the lines of the joint.

On one occasion our violin maker sold an instrument wholly of his own make to a gentleman at Newcastle-on-Tyne, who made the remark that no Englishman could make such a head or scroll as he found on the instrument he had bought, so the maker of the fiddle sent the gentleman the block of wood from which the neck and head had been cut.

One of the old standards who used to visit Askew's shop informed the writer that he had seen a dozen fiddles hanging up in his workshop, some unvarnished, others stringless and in various stages of dress. He had seen the shoemaker, when quietly stitching on the sole of a boot, suddenly throw down the boot from his knee, take up a fiddle and

run over the strings as if some idea had struck him whilst stitching his leather.

Chapter IV.

*THE VIOLIN AND EARLY VIOLIN
MAKERS.*

The violin the most perfect musical instrument has been evolved out of the earlier and more simple stringed instruments. We often read of Tubal, as in the scriptures, as being the inventor of the harp and was the father of all such as handle the harp and the organ. David and the House of Israel played before the Lord "on all manner of instruments made of fir-wood, even on harps and on psalteries and on timbrels and on cornets and cymbals." The sackbut is also mentioned and the instrument of ten strings. As at the present day we find musical instruments having been used in great events and ceremonies. In the Psalms of David we have this touching lament—"Wherefore did'st thou flee away secretly and steal away from me, and did'st not tell me that I might have sent thee

away with mirth and with song, with tabret and with harp."

From the psaltery or stringed instruments as the harp, lyre, harpiscord and viol has been evolved the violin. It is stated that both the viol and violin were believed to have their origin in the Indian ravanastron an instrument said to have been in use for 5,000 years and still used by the poor Buddhist begging monks of India, but this view is not accepted by modern experts.

The fiddle and fiddlers find a place in early writers, Strutt tells us that the name fiddlers, was applied to minstrels, as early as the fourteenth century as mentioned in the vision of "Piers Plowman" where we read—"Not to fare as a fydelor or a frier to seke feastes."

Oliver Cromwell in 1656 prohibited "all persons commonly called fiddlers, or minstrels, from playing, fiddling and making music in any inn, ale-house, or tavern." Butler in his adventures of Hudibras and Ralph helped to ridicule those who attempted to interfere with music.

Even before Cromwell made his prohibition laws a great school of fiddle-makers in Italy were evolving and shaping into

perfection an instrument of everlasting beauty.

Cremona, a city of Northern Italy on the banks of the river Po, became the great centre of the celebrated Italian violin makers who flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries. It is said that Gasparo Bertolotti, better known as Gasper d'Salo, of Brescia, Lombardy, who died in 1610, was the first maker of the violin as we know it. Andrea Amati (1530--1611) was the founder of the Cremonese school of violin-makers. The sons of Andrea, Antonio, Girolamo and Nicola followed in the trade and the instruments made by the Amati family were of considerable note commanding at this day prices reaching to hundreds of pounds. Nicola (1596--1684) was supposed to be the great man of the family. He was a son of Girolamo and he established or designed the model now known as the "Grand Amati" such instruments now commanding high prices.

There are quite a number of other early Italian makers as Andrea Guarneri (1630--1695) and his sons Joseph and Petrus, and Guiseppe Antonio, a nephew of Andrea, Carlo Bergonzi, and many others might be

mentioned but as our Stanhope maker attempted to copy Antonio Stradivari, who was a pupil of Nicola Amati, it is not necessary to refer specially to any of the old school except to the most celebrated violin-maker, Antonio Stradivari, who was even making instruments when 93 years of age. He was born in 1644 and died in 1737 and was Cremona's greatest representative of the craft of the old Italian School.

His best period was from 1700, and his instruments, especially of his best period, are considered to-day to be unrivalled as to tone production, quality, beauty of form and general workmanship.

When this prince of stringed instrument makers died he had 91 violins in his possession and during his long working period he was honoured and patronised by Kings and Princes, Noblemen and Court Orchestras, and he even specially made instruments for King James the Second of England.

Mr. Hart, in his book* quotes the following from the Arisi MSS. which shews the great popularity of Stradivari as a successful maker of stringed instruments.

*The Violin, its Famous Makers and their Imitators by George Hart, New Edition 1909, pp. 190-193.

“In the year 1685, on the 12th of March Cardinal Orsini, Archbishop of Benevento, ordered a Violoncello and two Violins, which were sent as a present to the Duke of Natalona, in Spain. The Cardinal, besides paying liberally for the work, wrote an appreciative acknowledgement of their merits and appointed the artist to the place of one of his private attendants.”

“In the same year, on the 12th of September, Bartolomeo Grandi, called Il. Fassina, leader of the Court Orchestra of His Royal Highness the Duke of Savoy, ordered of Stradivari a whole set of instruments for the Court Orchestra.

“In the year 1686, on the 5th of April, His Serene Highness the Duke of Modena (Francesco II. D’Este was then twenty-six years of age) ordered a Violoncello, which, by special invitation, Stradivari was requested to take to the Duke himself, who told him how pleased he was to make his personal acquaintance, praised greatly his work, and beyond the sum agreed upon paid him thirty pistoles (Golden Spanish) as a present.”

“On the 22nd of August, 1686, Marquis Michele Rodeschini ordered a Viol da Gamba

to be sent to King James II. of England."

"On the 19th of January, 1687, the Marquis Nicolo Rota ordered a Violoncello for the King of Spain."

"On the 7th of August of the same year, 1687, the nobleman Don Agostino Daria, General-in-Chief of Spanish Cavalry in Lombardy, while he was residing in Cremona, obtained from him a Violoncello."

Then "on the 19th of September. 1690, Stradivari received the following letter from the Marquis Bartolomeo Ariberti,—a Cremonese Nobleman—"The other day I made a present of the two Violins, and the Violoncello which you made for me, to His Highness the Prince of Tuscany, etc.'"

The Brothers Hill, in their book on this famous artist, say: "We learn from the Arisi MSS. that in 1682 the Venetian banker Michele Monzi ordered from Stradivari a complete set of instruments, which were destined to be presented to James II. of England," and remark that "We have no knowledge as to what has become of these instruments; they are not now amongst the royal possessions." (pp. 37-39).

From the same Manuscript we find that Giovanni Battista Volumier, Director of the Court Music of the King of Poland, went to Cremona in 1715, by special order of the King, to await the completion of twelve violins which had been ordered from Stradivari. (p. 238).

Violins of this maker during his best period bring big prices as the following two examples will show :—

The first is the "Tuscan," made in 1690, and the second the "Betts," made in 1704. The first represents the period before the year 1704 and the second, the "Betts," the period from 1704. In the above work the authors say of the "Tuscan,"—"The bold, original style, perfect technical workmanship and splendid all-round tone, completely convince one for the first time of his great skill and originality. The total characteristics of his fine and perfectly preserved violin are a woody and intensely brilliant quality, clear and resonant as a bell, but without a trace of metallic shrillness and a sonority made remarkably telling by the brilliancy of quantity (p. 155).

The "Tuscan" Strad Violin was purchased in Florence in 1790 for some £50; it

was sold in 1875 for £250 and was purchased in 1888 by Messrs. Hill and Sons for £1,000.

We further quote, from the above work mentioned, some particulars of the "Betts" Strad.:—

"The year 1704 brings us to one of the greatest production of Stradivari's life :—The instrument known as the "Betts." On looking at the violin, one cannot but be struck by the beauty of the formation of the long and relatively slender corners. It recalls to our minds some of the happiest efforts of Antonius and Hieronymus Amati, with the addition of a certain grandeur which they lack. The uniformity of the outline presents the perfection of symmetry, the full rounded model swells away from the edge with but a semblance of hollowing round the purfling. The "f" holes, cut with masterly decision and placed in a comparatively upright position, seem to fall naturally into complete harmony with the surrounding features, the head, though cut as a Stradivari only knew how to cut it, lacks something." Continuing they say—

"There is a squareness in the design, the fluting is wanting in breadth, the throat is

hesitatingly cut. The beauty of the materials from which this instrument is made leave nothing to be desired. The back and sides are of handsome maple, with well-proportioned broad curl; the back in two pieces, with the figure slanting from the joint in an upward direction,—a feature but rarely met with in instruments of earlier date. The pine for the belly is more open in the grain than hitherto; fine at the joint, but widening out to full $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch at the edges.” (pp. 51-54)

“The violin dated 1704, now known as the “Betts,” was bought by Arthur Betts for £1 is. It was sold by him, about 1852, for £500, to Mr. John Bone, of Devonport,—an amateur much addicted to the malady of continually exchanging instruments. He parted with his treasure, about 1859, to J. B. Vuillaume, through John Lott, for approximately £200. Vuillaume sold it to M. Wilmotte, of Antwerp, in 1861, for 7,000 francs, = £280; he, in turn, retained it until 1873 when Mr. C. G. Meir became its owner at the increased price of 15,000 francs, = £600. In 1878 George Hart bought it from the last-named amateur for £800, and not until 1886 could he be induced to sell it. In that year the Duc de Camposelice

became its possessor at the price of £1,200. We, Messrs. Hill and Sons, purchased it in 1891 at an increased price.” *

Chapter V.

ASKEW'S SUCCESS.

Any person examining a violin who knew nothing about such a stringed instrument would probably think that one fiddle was just like another, but when we come to experts they can spot the maker, as a rule, and even the varnish, from studying the general build of the instrument, the shape and position of the sound-holes, the quality of the wood, the curves of the belly and back, the position of the bass bar, the bridge the sound post and even the purfling and the general outline which, to be perfect, must form a combination of Hogarth's line of beauty. As a violin consists of fifty-eight separate parts, it takes a master-hand like the old Italian makers to turn out an instrument with perfect harmony

* Antonio Stradivari, His Life and Work, by Messrs. Hill. 2nd Ed. 1909, p. 285.

of design so as to please the eye of the connoisseur.

Hart, in his excellent book on the Violin,* speaking generally on violins, says—"The back is made of maple or sycamore, in one or two parts; the belly of the finest quality of Swiss pine, and from a piece usually divided, the sides, like the back, of maple, in six pieces, bent to the required form by means of a heated iron; the linings, which are used to secure the back and belly to the sides, are twelve in number, sometimes made of lime-tree, but also of pine. The bass or sound bar is of pine, placed under the left foot of the bridge in a slightly oblique position, in order to facilitate the vibrating by giving about the same position as the line of the strings."

It will be seen that it was no easy matter to make such a noble instrument, as the violin, which is admitted to be the king of stringed instruments. Our Stanhope genius said to one of his customers, after he had succeeded in gaining prizes at the London and Newcastle-on-Tyne Exhibitions, that fiddle-making "was the dream of his life."

*" The Violin; its Famous Masters and Imitators."—p. 35.

The dream was realised so far as his workmanship and his prizes above mentioned were concerned. When he made up his mind to exhibit his work in London he found a good help in his old friend, Mr. R. DeLacy, who was teacher of the old Saxhorn Band in its Crystal Palace days. Mr. DeLacy, then a Military Musical Instrument manufacturer at 84, Holland Road, Brixton, London, S.W., in a letter to our fiddle-maker, dated November 26th, 1885, says that he was glad he had got his violins back again, saying further, that he had sent them just as he had received them from the exhibition. Mr. DeLacy had taken charge of the violins Askew had sent up to the London exhibition and the maker had been asking him to value them so his friend, the former band teacher, further says, in regard to the price of the violins,—“this is a question I could not answer but you ought to have a very good price for them. I have been informed on the best authority they were played upon by Signor Arditi and Mr. Manns of the Crystal Palace. In a further letter dated 30th December, 1885, DeLacy says—“It is very kind of you to want to make a pair of boots for the balance, but this I cannot

allow. Believe me that what I did for you (in London) was done at the moment with the very best motive. I was determined to have the fiddles exhibited (at the Exhibition) at any cost, and I am amply rewarded at you having the medal which is a great thing considering the many magnificent cases of instruments that got nothing. I trust you will not let this drop but push on somehow and let the world know where you can be got at. I fancy if you were to advertise in the "Musical Times" it would do good."

Thus wrote a gentleman who was a good musician, an excellent cornet player, and who acted as judge at contests and who coached the old Stanhope Saxhorn Band for the Crystal Palace contest in 1860. He had not forgotten his Stanhope friends twenty-five years later, so he helped his old friend and bandsman to get his violins placed at the Inventions Exhibition in 1885. Askew was grateful for this help and he wanted to recompense his friend in London by making him a pair of boots, but Mr. DeLacy would not hear of it, notwithstanding he ordered boots for himself and his son and a friend of DeLacy's remarked that John Askew was an

artist not only in fiddle-making but in leather."

In the following pages will be found particulars of our Stanhope fiddle-maker at the London and Newcastle-upon-Tyne Exhibition.

Through the kindness of Mrs. Albert McCallum, daughter of Mr. Askew, the writer is able to reproduce illustrations of the bronze medal and the diplomas won by her father, with instruments wholly of his own make."

(Inscription on Bronze Medal)—

(Obverse) VICTORIA REGINA

(Bust of Queen Victoria).

(Reverse) INVENTIONS—MUSIC,

1885

INTERNATIONAL

INVENTIONS

EXHIBITION.

(Figures with Harp and Compass).



BRONZE MEDAL

Awarded to

JOHN ASKEW for Violins, 1885,

Copy of Diploma :—

V.R.

INTERNATIONAL
INVENTIONS
EXHIBITION,

LONDON, 1885.

THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL HAVE UPON THE
RECOMMENDATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
JURIES AWARDED A

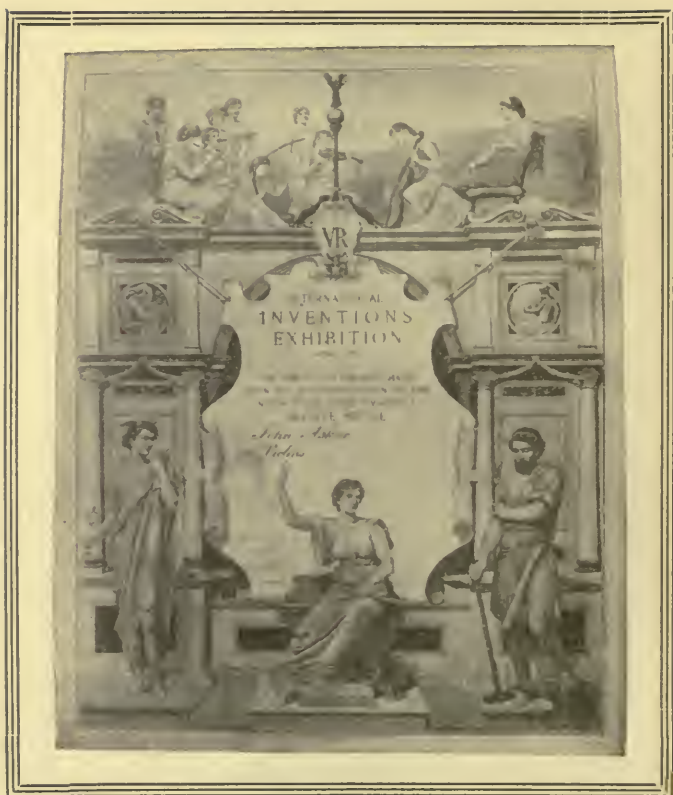
BRONZE MEDAL

To JOHN ASKEW

For Violins.

(Signed) Albert Edward, P.
President.

(Signed) Frederick Bramwell,
Chairman.



DIPLOMA

With the Bronze Medal for Violins, 1885,

By JOHN ASKEW.

Two years later the subject of our memoir, through the local Band Conductor, Mr. Thos. Wood, sent 4 violins to the Newcastle-on-Tyne Royal Mining, Engineering and Industrial Exhibition (International and Colonial) Jubilee year, 1887. The patron of this exhibition was His Grace The Duke of Northumberland, K.G.

The President was the Right Honourable The Earl of Ravensworth. The Exhibition was opened May 11th, 1887, and was closed on October 29th of the same year,

Mr. Wood provided a glass case for the Askew exhibits.

The following are the catalogue particulars :—

Under Division 13.—“Art Industries, Class J.—Musical Instruments” we find in the Exhibition Index—

“Askew, John, Stanhope, Darlington.”
697 “Artisans’ Exhibits.”

6 “Askew, John, Stanhope, Darlington.”

“Four Violins, Copies of Straduaris.”

“Cil varnished and made entirely by the
“Exhibitor.”

Under the awards of the Jurors in the musical section—“Artisans’ Exhibits” we find

the following :--

FIRST CLASS

JOHN ASKEW, TWO VIOLINS.

Under the heading "The Artisans' Exhibits" the "Newcastle Daily Chronicle," October 29th, 1887, contained the following :

"During the recent visit of the Dowager Duchess of Northumberland to the Exhibition, Her Grace was specially taken to see the Artisans' Exhibits carefully examining them and expressing great interest in them and admiration of many of them."

The following is a copy of the Diploma awarded to our Stanhope Violin Maker at the above Jubilee Exhibition, Newcastle.

NEWCASTLE (MONEO ET MUNIO) UPON - TYNE

ROYAL MINING EXHIBITION

ENGINEERING AND INDUSTRIAL

JUBILEE YEAR, 1887.

ARTISAN SECTION.

FIRST CLASS CERTIFICATE,

awarded to

JOHN ASKEW, of Stanhope, Darlington,
For Two Violins of Straduarius.

(Signed) Ravensworth, President.

John Daglish, Chairman of the
Executive Committee.

V.R.

Mr. John H. Wood, of Wood and Co., Military Band Instrument Makers, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, son of Thomas Wood, who was professional band master to the Stanhope Saxhorn Band, says, in respect to the above Jubilee Exhibition, "my Father, the late Thomas Wood, was the means of Mr. Askew exhibiting a case of 4 violins of his make in the Industrial Section of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Jubilee Exhibition, 1887, and I believe was awarded a Diploma for same. I think the instruments exhibited were sold during the Exhibition to various purchasers. My Father thought a great deal of Mr. Askew's ability as a violin-maker, and was the means of selling several instruments for him (17th December, 1912)."

The two prize violins at the London Inventions Exhibition, 1885, were evidently sent in 1886, to the shop or establishment of Mr. Wm. Crawford, Prof. of Music and dealer,

Bishop Auckland. Evidently the maker had taken the advice of Mr. DeLacy. Mr. Samuel T. Light, Teacher and Dealer of Music was with Mr. Crawford at the time, and he informed the writer that the prices fixed by the maker for these two violins were £25 each. They were not sold and were returned to the maker.

Evidently, one of the London prize violins at least, was sent and got a prize with its pair at the Jubilee Exhibition in 1887 :—

1885. 2 Violins, Bronze Medal and Diploma.

1887. 2 Violins, awarded first prize class.

One of the pair which obtained the medal was purchased, in 1894, by Miss G. I. Hildyard, it is dated 1883.

The other violin was exhibited both in London, 1885, and Newcastle, in 1887, and was bought by Mr. J. A. Van Gelderen, Surgeon Dentist, in 1887, and after using it 26 years it came into the hands of the writer.

It seems more than probable that both the London Medal violins would be exhibited at Newcastle but we have no direct proof.

Perhaps no one knew more about Askew and his fiddles than Mr. Towry Piper, a

violin expert who contributes very able articles to the "Strad" Magazine on violins and violin-makers particularly of the Cremonese and other old schools.

He frequently visited Askew, who made a violin for him and he had examined nearly all the instruments turned out by our Stanhope maker, of whom he says was unquestionably a clever workman and did wonders considering his lack of proper training, and further, "the obtaining of the bronze medal was a creditable achievement for one who was entirely self taught."

In the September "Strad," 1911, Mr. Towry Piper contributed an interesting paper on "Brother Scrapers," being some modern reminiscence of violin players, and the following is what the author of the paper says of our Stanhope musician :—

"A character of a different type was John Askew, cobbler and fiddle-maker of Stanhope, County of Durham, whom I happened upon in more recent years ; and who, if not a downright genius, was at any rate an exceedingly skilful workman. Had his efforts been properly directed he might have made something more than a

local name for himself, as it was he succeeded in obtaining a bronze medal for some of his instruments which were sent to the Inventions Exhibition for 1885. He had no work bench, and at the time of our first acquaintance his tools were few and of a primitive nature. I have seen him "shoot" the joint in the back of a fiddle with the plane, and make an accurate job of it, holding the pieces the while upon his knee.

On the first occasion when I visited him he produced a well worn copy of the first edition of Hart's book, every page which bore frequent evidences to the fact that, like Lady Slattern, he had a most observing thumb. He died something over half a score of years since and there are a few lines about him in Meredith Morris's book on the "British Fiddle-Makers."



Chapter VI.

ASKEW'S VIOLINS.

The number of Instruments made which come under the above name is not exactly known. Mr. A. Towry Piper, who frequently visited Askew's shop at Stanhope, told the writer in March, 1913, that he had examined some 30 instruments of his make. A person who had to make his living as a shoemaker could not possibly turn out a large number of violins, and further, it might be stated, he was not specially trained to this work, consequently, he had to read books and study the art as he felt his way, so progress in fiddle-making would, in the first instance, be slow. The earliest dated and signed instrument known to the writer was made in 1877, and his last was made in 1895, eighteen years later. Considering, however, that he is reported to have got pine wood from the old Stanhope Church at the restoration in 1867, when the old pine baulks and galleries were taken out, it seems that at this date he was, at any rate, studying the instrument. His great friend,

Benson, is also said to have got pine wood from the Church at the restoration in 1867. Evidently Askew and he were laying it up for future use, as it does not appear that our future fiddle-maker had commenced the "dream of his life" at this date. In 1894 he informed the purchaser of one of the London prize violins that he had made a good many fiddles, but only 10 or 12 what he considered perfect ones.

Askew was born in 1834, and probably left the Grey Bull Inn soon after he married, and came to live at the Butt's Head in the Market Place, then he came to Albert Cottage, then to Bond Isle Terrace, and then to the Bainbridge buildings in the main street opposite to east part of the Rectory buildings, and from here he came to live at the house and shop opposite the Queen's Head Inn and now occupied by Mr. Indian. Askew was at Albert Cottage in the main street at the east end of Stanhope from May 13th, 1871 to November 23rd, 1874, and during his residence here he made his first fiddle. Mr. C. F. Tinkler, who knew Askew well, informed the writer that he frequently visited his shoemaker's shop at Albert Cottage, and on one occasion

Askew handed over to Mr. Tinkler, a fiddle, saying that it was the first fiddle he had made, and that he did not like it, as it had a lion's head or similar figure in place of a scroll. After some conversation Mr. Tinkler bought the fiddle, the price being thirty shillings. This was our violin-maker's first effort as stated by himself, to the purchaser, but it is not clear when it was made as the instrument contains no name or date inside or elsewhere. It nevertheless, has a little bit history. The lion's head did not satisfy the maker so he sold the instrument. After some little time the first purchaser sold it to a neighbour, Mr. Ralph Currah, Westholm, Stanhope, who was then interested in music. On the same day the writer received the above information he called upon Mr. Currah, who brought out the fiddle in its case where for many years it had laid untouched, and it was practically stringless. Mr. Currah informed the writer that it was the same instrument that he bought from Mr. Tinkler years ago. On examination it was found that a scroll head had been spliced on to the neck. This somewhat confirmed the statement about the lion's head, but Mr. Currah could not

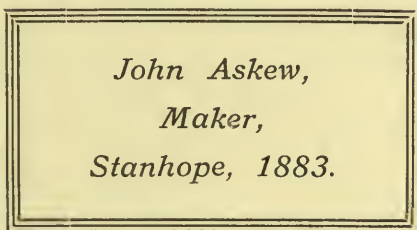
remember anything about the spliced on neck and scroll. The back and breast or belly of this instrument have no purfling. The back is of two pieces of hard wood, and the belly is of poor pine. It is close grained in the middle but at the hollowed margins the grain or reed is very wide. Evidently the fiddle was made between 1871 and 1874, the dates of residence at Albert Cottage.

The following are the measurements of this first attempt, and an "Askew" dated 1884, and a "Strad" dated 1716.

	"Askew."	"Askew"	"Strad."
	1871-4.	1884.	1716.
Length ...	13 $\frac{7}{8}$ "	14"	14"
Width ...	7 $\frac{3}{4}$	8 $\frac{1}{8}$	8 $\frac{1}{4}$
„ ...	6 $\frac{1}{4}$	6 $\frac{3}{16}$	6 $\frac{5}{16}$
Ribs Sides	1 $\frac{1}{16}$	1 $\frac{5}{16}$	1 $\frac{1}{4}$
„	1 $\frac{1}{16}$	1 $\frac{3}{16}$	1 $\frac{3}{16}$

The following list gives the present owners of the "Askew" violins so far as is

known to the writer. The style of label written by himself is given below.



NAME.		DATE.
1.—Ralph Currah		1871-1874
2.—W. J. McIntyre	...	1877
3.—W. M. Egglestone	...	1878
4.—Joseph Henderson	...	1879
5.—George R. Moor	...	1879
6.—Joseph T. Bainbridge	...	1881
7.—W. M. Egglestone	...	1882
8.—Miss G. I. Hildyard	...	1883
9.—W. M. Egglestone	...	1884
10.—Dr. J. Gray	...	1886
11.—George Ball	...	1886
12.—Miss A. Stobart	...	1887
13.—Mrs. E. E. Wells	...	1888
14.—Robert Racher	...	1893
15.—Clarkson Close	...	1893
16.—Thos. Ball	...	1895
17.—John James Askew	...	—

The writer has not been able to obtain the address of John James Askew, grandson of the maker, so cannot give the date.

Generally, our violin-maker turned out one instrument per year from 1877. Two were made in 1879 but none next year, so it fills up 1879—1880. None were made in 1885 but this was the London Exhibition year, and our maker would be more concerned with exhibiting fiddles than making them, but he turned out two in 1886. Then the writer has not been able to trace any violins made in the years 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892. Two were made in 1893, none in 1894, that is completed, and the last violin he made in 1895, the year of the maker's death. These conclusions are come to from information received. It is possible that four or five instruments were made in the years from 1889 to 1892, inclusive giving a suggested total of 23 or 24 instruments.

THE "HILDYARD" ASKEW.

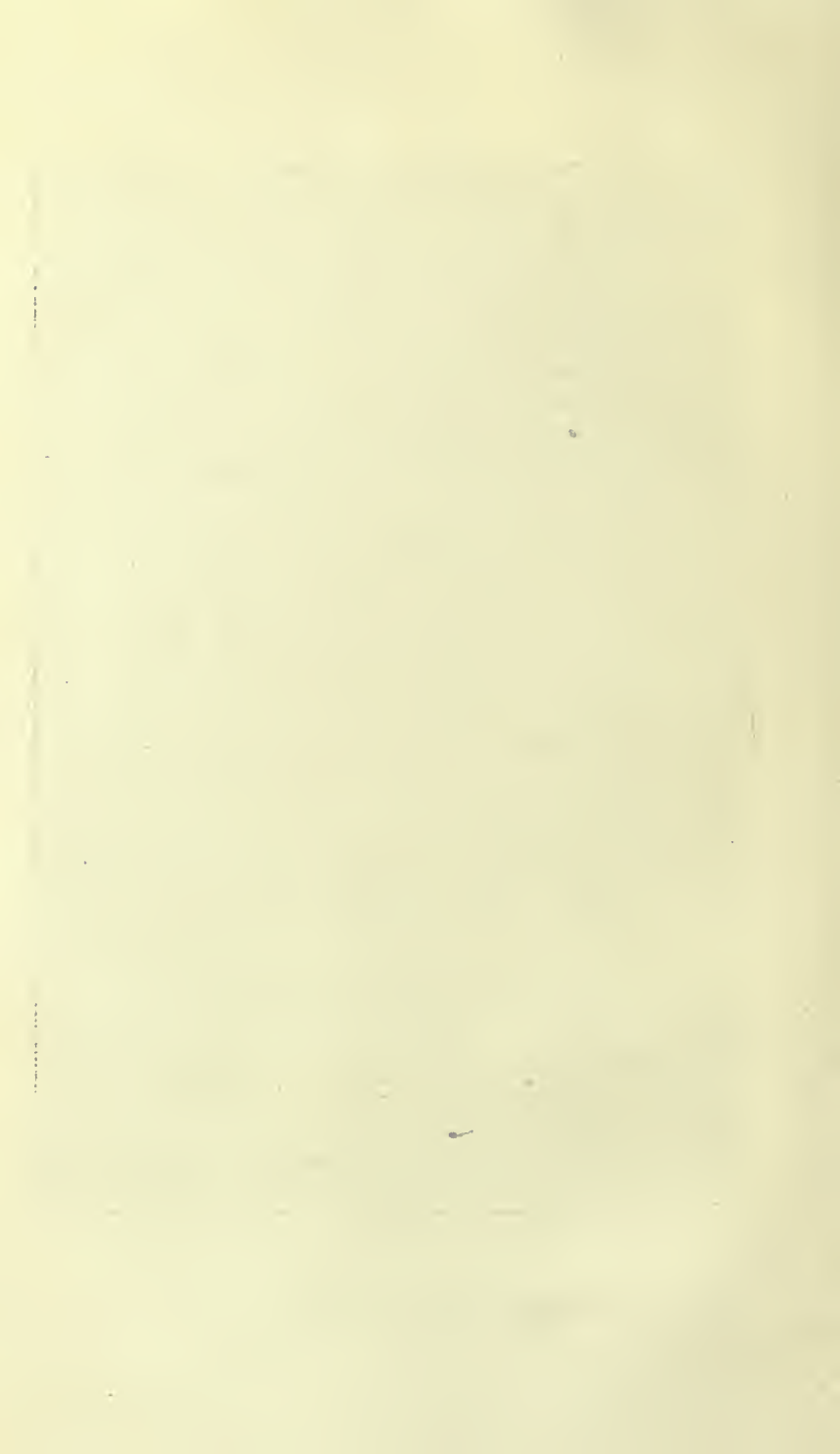
The violin, dated 1883, now in the possession of Miss Gertrude I. Hildyard, may be denominated by the name of the owner. It is the violin or rather one of the pair which



THE "HILDYARD" ASKEW, 1883.

BRONZE MEDAL, 1885.

MISS GERTRUDE I. HILDYARD.



won the bronze medal at the Inventions' Exhibition, London, in 1885, and was purchased from the maker by the present owner in November, 1894. The other one of the pair sent to London was sold to a Newcastle gentleman, Mr. J. Adolph Van Gelderen, Surgeon Dentist (see "VAN GELDEREN.") In respect to the remarks of Mr. DeLacey in his letter to Mr. Askew, November, 1885, he says that he had been informed on good authority that Signor Arditi and Mr. Manns had played on these prize violins. The opinions of these deceased musicians just named would be highly valued as those of eminent men. Sir Augustus Manns was the well-known conductor of the Crystal Palace Orchestra, and Signor Arditi that of the Italian Opera. The "HILDYARD" violin has a very good tone and has been in regular use at concerts and home work by the owner since it was purchased in 1894. Fortunately Miss Hildyard was very much interested in the maker as well as in his instruments, and the writer is indebted to this lady for permission to insert here some interesting extracts from her diary during the period covering the buying of the medal violin (October, November, 1894.)

These notes throw some light on the life of the maker, his tools* and instruments.

1894, October 13th. I go to see Mr. Askew and his violins, found the old man very feeble and ill, but very anxious to talk about his violin-making and the old musical world of Stanhope.

I asked him what first put it into his head to make violins.

"It was just the dream of my life," he replied, "I hardly know when I first thought of it."

"How did you set about it?"

"Well, I first studied hard from old writings on the subject. The old Italian and French books on the subject were the best."

"How did you manage this? Were you in any way a French or Italian Scholar?"

"No, not at all, I knew about six words of each language, and the schoolmaster, who was my great friend, knew about the same, we bought dictionaries and just puzzled the books out between us, it was hard work."

* The late Mr. Askew's tools were purchased by Mr. J. E. Harris, Violin-maker, of Gateshead, in 1896, and Mr. Harris informs the writer (1913) that he was still using the tools which he purchased from the widow.



THE "HILDYARD" ASKEW,
Dated 1885.
BRONZE MEDAL, 1885.



THE "HILDYARD" ASKEW.

BRONZE MEDAL, 1885.

“How did you get these books?”

“I had a good friend in Newcastle, who lent me some, and others I had to buy, and they were both difficult to find and costly.”

“When you started to make a violin, had you a complete outfit of special tools for the purpose?”

“No, I think very few, in fact my sharp razor was the most useful tool I had.”

“Where did you get the special wood for making the violins?”

“Well, this was the most difficult part, but my Newcastle friend helped me in this; it all depends on the wood being perfectly seasoned and the right way of the grain. I paid £5 for the wood for the medal violin—just a rough block, and the first tool I put into it might have spoilt the whole thing, but I was lucky with that.”

“Had you a model violin to work from?”

“Yes, my Newcastle friend lent me a very fine “Strad,” but I only had it for a time.”

“How about the varnish?”

“Ah! that was a puzzle but I got the receipt for it out of an Italian book. The Schoolmaster and I mixed it, and it was an exciting hour when I put it first on a violin

but it was the right thing."

"How many violins have you made?"

"A good many, but only about 10 or 12 really perfect ones. I used to get one made and then string it, and perhaps after all my trouble it was not right. You can't patch a violin to make it right, it must be right straight away, these I used to hang up there"—(pointing to a row of apparently half-finished violins hanging on pegs).

"You used to play in the Old Stanhope Band?"

"Yes, I could play then, it was a good band, and we did well in London in 1860. We had some fine instruments too."

"What happened to the band?"

"Well it was a great pity, but disputes arose and the band broke up, and some of its members left Stanhope, and it all came to an end."

"How about the instruments?"

"Some went with those who played them, others, well, one very fine 'cello was stored for years in a dark, damp cupboard under the bridge arch of Stanhope Castle gardens."

"And to return to the medal violin I have

just bought do you consider it was the best you ever made ? ”

“ Yes, undoubtedly, I made a pair, you had to do that for the exhibition, the other was also good, but this one was far the finest tone.”

“ Do you think the violin you are now making is going to be a good one ? ”

“ Yes, I almost think it will be as good as the medal one.”

(Askew was making a violin at this time which he was very anxious I should also buy. It was a nice instrument. I had it to try but did not consider it equal to the one I already had. It was the last he made.—G.I.H.)

“ And who bought the pair to my violin ? ”

“ A gentleman in Newcastle.”

“ He would rather have bought yours only for that mishap to the neck of the violin.”

(I must here say that when I bought the medal violin there was a slight break in the neck of the instrument through some accident which Mr. Askew did not care to tell me about, but which he pointed out very carefully to me. I took the instrument to

Messrs. Hill and Sons, of Bond Street, who at once put it right, and they said it in no way detracted from its value. It was what any violin might perhaps at some time require.—G.I.H., November, 1913.)

“And I think he chose the wrong one anyhow.”

“Will you play me something?” said Askew.

“So I played him the ‘Adagio,’ out of Rode’s 7th Concerto, and part of the ‘Perpetual Motion,’ and then left taking away the violin. The old man seemed sadly shaken and ill, and I fear his violin-making days are nearly over. November 24th, 1894 ”
—G.I.H.

THE TWO MEDAL ASKEWS,

1883—1884.

The above two instruments after being returned from the Inventions Exhibition, London, 1885, were sent down to the music shop of Mr. Crawford, Bishop Auckland, and the maker set the price at £25 each. They were in this shop in 1886. Evidently our

fiddle-maker had taken Mr. DeLacy's advice as to the disposal of his instruments.

Mr. S. T. Light, who was in Mr. Crawford's shop at the time, informed the writer that the violins, which he understood to be the prize ones, were sent back to the maker. Then we find, that on or about the year 1890, Mr. Albert Smith got one of these prize violins of John Askew. In January, 1891, Mr. Smith writes to the maker to say that "no doubt you will be pleased to hear that your medal violin is daily improving," and then says "you will see that I have sent you a new pedigree-form, upon which I ask you to enter the undermentioned :—

September 27th, 1890.

"This instrument was awarded a prize (bronze) Medal at the International Inventions Exhibition, London, 1885."

In May, 1913, twenty-two years later, the writer communicated with Mr. Smith about this violin, and he replied as follows :—

"The violin I had from Mr. Askew I do not think had the date in, but I can give you a very good idea when it was made. He got

a diploma and medal at the great International Exhibition, 1885, for the instrument I had from him, which I returned to him later in exchange for another, and from what I gathered from him, was, that he made the violin specially for the Exhibition, and no doubt completed it about that date to send there." Mr. Smith further suggests that the late Mr. Askew's friends might remember what became of this violin.

It seems quite clear that this instrument, from which the above label had not been inserted, was the one bought in 1894 by Miss Hildyard, and is dated 1883.

The writer is of opinion that the "Hildyard" instrument was sent to the Jubilee Exhibition, Newcastle, 1887, and was one of the two to which "first prize" was given.

THE "VAN GELDEREN" ASKEW.

This violin, dated 1884, is the pair to that of the "Hildyard." It was bought from Mr. Askew, in 1887, by Mr. J. A. Van Gelderen, Surgeon Dentist and Violinist, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, through Mr. Thomas Wood, band

master of the Elswick Works Band, and at that time one of the leading musicians in the north. Mr. Van Gelderen informed the writer (April, 1913) that it was the actual violin [one of the two] that took the prize in London in 1885, and that it was one of the prize violins exhibited at the Jubilee Exhibition, Newcastle-on-Tyne, in 1887. Our violin-maker made two instruments for the London Exhibition. The "Hildyard," dated 1883, and the "Van Gelderen," dated 1884. In April, 1913 our violinist on the Tyne informed the writer that his fiddle had been played upon daily during the 26 years he had had it in his possession, and was further informed that many professionals in Newcastle had played upon his violin, mentioning Mr. Derbyshire and Mr. A. Van Beine, the 'cellist. The instrument is stamped—J, ASKEW, in capital letters on the back near the neck, and also on the belly underneath the small end of the tail piece. The ticket inside in the maker's handwriting is "John Askew, Maker, Stanhope, 1884." The owner had many offers for this instrument, but under the circumstances he much preferred that the author of this book on Askew had it.

Mr. Van Gelderen was good enough, after the price was agreed to, to bring the fiddle from Newcastle-on-Tyne to Stanhope, on the 16th April, 1913, as he did not like to trust it through the post. It is now the writer's property.

It would be interesting to give some account of this violin during the 26 years* it was in harness in Newcastle, 1887 to 1912, but a short reference only will be made.

Our Newcastle violinist was in touch with the principal musicians of the day such as Mr. Derbyshire, Conductor of the Theatre Royal Orchestra, Mr. Auguste Van Biene, the great 'cello player, etc., and he was associated with and took part as violinist, in many concerts and musical gatherings, such as the Claremont Operatic and Orchestral Society ; the Church Institute, Hood Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne ; the Durham University College of Medicine Musical Society entertainments held at the College of Medicine ; the Art Gallery Amateur

* "It is believed that a violin does not reach its full power and its best condition until it has been made and played from 30 to 40 years."—*The Violin and its Story*, by Hyacinth Abele, Translation by Geoffrey Alwyn, 1905, p. 119.

Musical and Dramatic Club; St. Nicholas Church Temperance Society, and many other societies. In one letter, dated 17th May, 1888, Mr. Derbyshire writes to Mr. Van Gelderen, saying—"I fully expected you to-day, I hope I am not to give you up as lost." On another occasion Van Biene* writes to Van Gelderen, from the Station Hotel, Newcastle, as follows:—"I thought I should have seen you this week. I am staying to-morrow, Sunday, to give a Recital at the Metropole, Gateshead, and shall be glad if you will pop in to-morrow, Sunday, at the above to have a chat." It will be seen that Mr. Van Gelderen was moving in musical circles, and would thus be acquainted with all the musical people and societies in Newcastle.

* "Auguste Van Biene was Dutch by birth, was educated at Brussels, and at the age of 17 came to London with his 'Cello and a small purse. Sir Michael Costa picked him up and offered him a post in the Orchestra at Covent Garden. "He was," says the Strad, "a man of kindly nature, popular with all classes, and his early hardships had made charitably disposed. so that his services were readily given for any good cause. He died suddenly on the 24th of January, 1913, aged 63 years. when engaged at the Brighton Hippodrome. A fortnight previously before his death he was playing in London, his last appearance being at the Press Club,"

Our fiddle-maker informed Miss Hildyard that he gave £5 for the wood from which the medal violin, or violins, were made. When sent to Bishop Auckland the violins were valued on the market, at £25 each as previously stated. The writer has not had the pleasure of examining the "Hildyard" Askew, but its pair instrument the "Van Gelderen," can only be described as a thing of beauty. The back is in two pieces and the silvery curl of the wood under its transparent golden varnish is mindful of the ever shifting "Northern Lights." The ribs or sides also give the same shifting panorama or silvery glint. It is a beautiful instrument and has a solid good tone.

THE "HILTON" ASKEW.

The writer has called this instrument, dated 1893, the "Hilton," because its owner, Mr. Abraham Hilton, of Barnard Castle, bought it from Mr. Askew and kept it all his life. Mr. Hilton was well-known in Yorkshire and the Durham dales, and many old people can remember him riding through the villages

with his white horse and saddlebags. He was in a business which necessitated extensive travelling in the northern dales. He was a good musician, the fiddle being his choice instrument, and on which he was no mean performer. He frequently visited Askew's shop at Stanhope, and assisted him to sell some of his instruments. Mr. Askew made a violin specially for Mr. Hilton; when this instrument was in hand Mr. Clarkson Close of Leeds visited Stanhope, and, being a well-known violinist and a collector, he sought out the Stanhope violin-maker, who, on shewing him the Hilton instrument he was making, asked his opinion. After examination Mr. Close considered the violin was a good one, and suggested one or two little points which he thought would be an improvement. Some years afterwards when Mr. Close, purchased Hilton's collection of violins (1901-3), he found the same violin in the collection and it shewed that his suggestions had been carried out. Mr. Close spent some time in the Auckland district, and, during his spare time hunted up all the instruments in the locality, thus getting in touch with our Stanhope

fiddle-maker when he visited this place. As previously mentioned Mr. Close paid a great compliment to Askew when he considered that if he had been in Hill's workshop he would perhaps have been the finest English Maker. Our Leeds friend, a collector of violins to the number of between 30 and 40 instruments, says, next to the fine Italian makers he likes the specimens of our English makers. The owner of the above violin says that his "Hilton" instrument appears to have been varnished with Whitelaw's varnish, and is dated 1893. Hilton's collection of violins included, says Mr. Piper, a J. B. Vuillaume, purchased in the 1851 Exhibition, and two or three by N. F. Vuillaume.

THE "LONG STRAD" COPY.

This violin, dated 1893, was specially made for Mr. Towry Piper, who brought Mr. Askew some proper fiddle-making tools and supplied him with the necessary wood for this fiddle. The model for the copy was an instrument of that pattern made by Nicholas F. Vuillaume, a well-known Brussels Maker.

This was the only fiddle of this pattern—the “Long Strad”—made by Mr. Askew. It was finished and is dated 1893, as above-mentioned. A year after Mr. Piper gave the instrument to Mr. Robert J. Racher, of Barnard Castle, who was then leader of an Orchestra, which, at that time, was run by Mr. Piper, who told the writer in 1913 that this Long Strad copy turned out fairly well.

Mr. Robert Racher informed the writer of these notes that his Long Strad Askew violin had a label containing the following words :—

“Johann Askew, Maker,
Stanhope, Fecit 1893.”

The orchestra leader, above-mentioned, has used this violin ever since he got it in 1894, and mentions that “it has a big tone of good quality, and I always,” says Mr. Racher, “take it to play on if I am playing outside, also for four or five years I was leader of the band at Choral Society Concerts here and I played on this fiddle at the practices and at the concerts in the choruses where a big tone was essential.” This instrument has a whole back and is $14\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length of body,

being about a quarter of an inch longer than the usual Strad model.

THE "HENDERSON" ASKEW.

This instrument now owned by Mr. Joseph Henderson, Front Street, Stanhope, is dated 1879. It was purchased in the early part of the year 1913 from Mr. Sydney Monk, who is a keen violinist, and who played upon this violin for 17 years. It appears to have come into the hands of Mr. Henry Vart, a well known violinist, then into the hands of Mr. Robert Blackett, a teacher of music, from whom Mr. Monk purchased it in 1895. Having played upon the instrument for 17 years its owner would know its good points, and he assured the purchaser with every confidence that the tone of this "Askew" was good and would still improve. We have further independent evidence which bears out what the last owner said about the fiddle. Mr. Clarkson Close, informs us that when in south Durham some years ago he examined Mr. Monk's violin, and described it to the writer as quite a nice instrument, with

a good tone, and a well made one with John Askew's own varnish. On this "Henderson" Askew is stamped on the back near the neck and also on the block near the tail piece, with the maker's name—J. ASKEW.

OTHER ASKEW VIOLINS.

1877.

The earliest dated violin known to the writer is one in possession of Mr. W. J. McIntyre having the above date. It was obtained from the maker about the year 1883.

1878.

The writer has one dated as above and which was purchased from Mr. McIntyre in the early part of the year 1913. This instrument was obtained from the maker in the first instance about thirty years ago, or near the year 1883 and it does not appear to have been much used. It is clean and new looking, and is covered with the makers own varnish of a deep reddish colour and even.

1879.

Mr. George Race Moor has an Askew with the above date, and was bought direct from the maker several years ago. It is a good instrument and has been in regular use since it was purchased.

1881.

Another nice violin dated 1881 is in the possession of Mr. Joseph T. Bainbridge; it belonged to his father who bought it from the maker. It is a good example of Askew's work.

THE "PHŒNIX,"

A violin made in this year, 1882, was in regular use for a number of years in Weardale. It came in for a lot of work in connection with social events. When this instrument came into the possession of the writer, it was found to be fitted with an unsatisfactory neck and scroll, but how this neck came to be fixed is unknown to the writer. In addition, the varnish was cracked and wrinkled all over the body of the instrument which gave it a somewhat ragged appearance. It appeared



THE "PHOENIX" ASKEW,
1882.

to want a thorough overhauling so it was sent by the writer to Messrs. Hill and Sons, London. In due course the repairs were completed and the instrument returned in May, 1913, with quite a new appearance and that is the reason this violin is called the "Phoenix."

In sending the violin back, Messrs. Hill and Sons, said—"they hoped the instrument would reach its destination in the first-class condition it was leaving them," and further—"we think the repair has turned out most satisfactorily both in appearance and from a trial point of view, and we feel confident that it cannot fail to meet with your entire approval." In closing their note they say—"after you have given it time to settle down and also played upon, we shall be pleased to learn what you think of it."* The violin has an excellent tone and is, in every way, satisfactory.

1886.

An Askew Violin dated as above is in the possession of Dr. Gray. It is a nice

*William E. Hill and Sons, 140, New Bond Street, London, W., Violin and Bow Makers to His Majesty the King; H.M. the King of Italy; H.M. the Queen of Holland; H.M. the Late King Edward VII.; H.M. the Late Queen Victoria, &c, &c.

instrument and was one of the four oil-varnished exhibits at the Newcastle-on-Tyne Jubilee Exhibition, 1887.

1886.

Mr. George Ball purchased this violin from the maker's daughter, Mrs. McCallum, about 15 years ago (1898), and it has been practically in use ever since, up to about the last twelve months. It has a good tone and has been lent several times to good violinists when they have been officiating at Concert Halls, and such gatherings and in their opinion, as well as the owner's, it is a good instrument.

1887.

Miss A. Stobart bought one of the violins from the maker's daughter in 1896, and it is dated as above, the year of the Jubilee Exhibition at Newcastle. It has since that time been in use by the owner and her niece, and is a good sound instrument with a nice tone.

The "WELLS," 1888.

In the year 1891, Mr. Thos. Scott Winter of South Shields, bought a violin of the late



THE "PHENIX" ASKEW,
1882.

Mr. Askew, with the inside ticket, "John Askew, Maker, Stanhope, 1888." The purchaser informed the writer that he bought it for his daughter, now Mrs. Wells, who still has the instrument. Before the purchase Mr. Winter had the instrument tested by an expert, who pronounced it one of the finest violins he had ever tried. "Other violinists have said," says Mr. Winter, "that Askew was one of the finest makers of violins, and that they would increase in value." Mr. Winter's daughter, Mrs. Wells, is still (1913) using the violin, and has used it regularly at concerts and home practice. This lady praises her instrument as having a sweet and powerful tone, and is of opinion that "a better instrument than mine, I consider, cannot be found." This violin was made the year after the maker's success at the Newcastle-on-Tyne Jubilee Exhibition in 1887.

No record 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892.

1895.

This instrument is owned by Mr. Thos. Ball and it appears to be the last made by our violin-maker. In Miss Hildyard's "Diary" we find (November, 1894);—

“Do you think the violin you are making is going to be a good one ?

“ Yes, I almost think it will be as good as the medal one ” (Askew was making a violin at this time which he was anxious I should buy. It was a nice instrument. I had it to try, but did not consider it equal to the one I already had. It was the last he made.”
G.I.H.

The owner writing in 1913 says, I have a violin made by Askew, and it is in perfect condition and dated inside 1895.

Chapter VII.

THE LONDON GAZETTE.

The LONDON GAZETTE, No. 25526, p. 5073.

The following entries are copied from the “Supplement to the London Gazette,” of Tuesday the 3rd, of November (published by authority), Wednesday, November 4th, 1885.

International Inventions Exhibition,
London, 1885, Jury Awards in Division
II. (Music) and “ Old London Exhibits.”

VIOLINS.			
Catalogue No.	Name of Exhibitor.	Subject of Award	Award.
3719	Askew, John -	Violins (England)	Bronze Medal
3693	Duncan, George	Violins (Scotland)	Gold Medal
3694	Pearce, W. R. -	Violins (England)	Bronze Medal
3696	Sprenger, A. -	Violins (Germany)	Bronze Medal
3729	Szepessy, Bela -	Violins	Silver Medal

The above awards were for violins only. A short account of those exhibiting along side of our Stanhope Violin-maker will no doubt be interesting.

DUNCAN, GEORGE, was born 1855, at Kingstone-on-Spey, in Morayshire, Scotland, and established himself as a repairer and maker of Violins in 1875, and succeeded in gaining a gold medal in 1885 as in the above list. His violins are said to have frequently been sold for £30 when new. In 1892 Duncan went to America. His label was :—"Made

by George Duncan, Glasgow," with the year. His instruments were models of the two great makers—Stradivari and Guarneri. Morris says that Duncan was a born artist,

PEARCE, WILLIAM ROBERT, b. 1833, d. 1897. A maker and repairer in London. Used a brilliant amber-coloured oil varnish. Awarded medals 1884 and 1855."—*Stainer's Dic. of Violin-Makers.*

SPRENGER, ANTON.—Stainer gives the the following: "b. 1834, Mittenwald. Was there a pupil of Anton Hornsteiner, later worked under Tiefenbrunner of Munich, and Kindl and also Fischer in Vienna. In 1870 he settled at Stuttgart, at 23, Hospitalstrasse. He made violins and violoncellos on the Stradivari and Guarneri patterns, using oil varnish of good quality. Died 1900." Probably the same as in the above list of Awards, 1885.

BELA, SZEPESSY, b. November 30, 1856, Budapest. Apprenticed to Samuel Nemessany in Budapest, from August, 1868, till May 24, 1874, Then went to Vienna and worked under Zach till October 20, 1879. Was then in Munich, but left 1881, to settle in London, where he has his own business. He has

personally made and varnished up to the present time (1896) 104 violins, 4 violas, and 2 violoncellos. He generally follows the Stradivari and Guarneri patterns, but in a few cases that of Nicola Amati; he used oil varnish of soft quality, a yellow-red colour. His instruments are much liked.—*Stainer's Dict., Violin-Makers.*

Probably this is the same person as in the above list, the name, however, is entered—Szepessy, Bela, in the Gazette.

The second list taken from the same London Gazette are those who were awarded prizes for Violins and Violoncellos, and Violins and Tenors. A short notice of the British Exhibitors at the Exhibition, 1885, may be of interest :—



VIOLINS, VIOLONCELLOS, &c.				
3714	Dosi, Pietro (Italy)	-	Violins and Tenors	- Bronze Medal
3721	Gilbert, Jeffrey J.	-	Violins and Tenors	- Silver Medal
3728	Hammig, W. H. (Germany)	-	Violins and Bows	- Silver Medal
3720	Hill, W. E. and Sons	-	Violins, Violoncellos and Bows	Gold Medal
3697	Jühling, F. (Germany)	-	Violins and Violoncellos	- Silver Medal
3695	Löwenthal, L. (Germany)	-	Violins, Violoncellos and Bows	Silver Medal
3727	Mayson, Walter H.	-	Violins and Violoncellos	- Bronze Medal
3724	Whitmarsh, Emanuel	-	Violins and Tenors	- Bronze Medal

GILBERT, JEFFREY J. (Violins and Tenors), Peterborough, born 1850, was a good workman, and his instruments were of the value of some £30. Morris gives the number of violins made at 130, and other instruments bring the number up to 156, in the year 1904. An interesting biographical sketch is given in Meredith Morris's *British Violin-Makers*, from which we quote the following :—" Mr. Gilbert's instruments have gained the following prizes :—International Exhibition, Crystal Palace, 1884, Silver Medal (highest award) ; International Inventions Exhibition, London, 1885, Silver Medal ; International Exhibition, Edinburgh, 1899, Gold Medal."

HILL, W. E. AND SONS, The well-known firm of New Bond Street, London, and previously mentioned in these pages, are too well known to require any notice here.

MAYSON, WALTER H.—The reputation of this violin-maker has been well attested by his life story by the Revd. Meredith Morris, 1906. Mr. Mayson was born at Cheetwood, Manchester, 1835, was self-taught, and commenced making violins in 1873. Up to 1904, the date of Mr. Morris's book, Mayson

had made 733 instruments. On the backs of many of his fiddles he carved rocky landscapes, flowers, etc. He won medals at Cork, 1883; Inventions Exhibition, London, 1885; Melbourne, 1888. His prices are from £10 up to £60.

WHITMARCH, EMMANUEL.—The name appears in Morris's Dictionary, but it is not clear that he is the same person as in the Gazette list.

As there are a number of books and dictionaries on violins and violin-makers, it is not necessary to mention other members of the craft or their works in this chapter, except one violin-maker and author, namely, Mr. Edward Heron-Allen, must have a place.

In 1893, Mr. Heron-Allen refused Mr. P. W. Pickup's offer of £2,000 for his splendid library of books and pamphlets on Fiddles and Fiddle-makers. He was born in London in 1861, was educated at Harrow, and very soon began fiddle-making, and then published his book "Violin Making, as it Was and Is."

The Rev. Meredith Morris, in his book on "British Violin Makers," 1904, says:—Mr. Heron-Allen has ceased to make fiddles,

but is keener than ever on Fiddle Lore. Since 1885 he has continued to amass books on the subject, and he is proud to possess a good many works which are not represented in the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale, nor in the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels. He published a catalogue of them in 1891-94, in two volumes, quarto, under the title of *De Fidiculis Bibliographia*, comprising about 1400 items. For his first book he was sent by the Commisioners of the Inventions and Music Exhibition of 1885 to collect ancient musical instruments, and he received a certificate of merit and a silver medal ; for his Bibliography he was elected *Socio Onorario e Benemerito* of the Academia di Santa Cecilia in Rome. His further publications have been "Hodges v. Chanot—the History of a Celebrated Case," "Fidiculana," and a book of essays on the violin, "The Letters of de Beriot ;" "The seal of Roger Wade ;" a curious early document upon the Welsh Grwth, and "The Arts and Crafts Book of the Worshipful Guild of Markneukirchen Violin Makers."—p. 61.



*Chapter VIII.**EXHIBITING THE ASKEW VIOLINS.*

Mr. DeLacy gives us some account of the ups-and-downs in placing the Askew instruments in the Inventions Exhibition, London, 1885; he writes April 15th, 1885, as follows:—

“ London is a big city, this you have heard before. But when you hear we are a great distance from South Kensington, and have to use two Company’s Railways to get there you will be surprised. From Loughborough junction, or Brixton Station as it is called, to Victoria Station is a good half hour’s ride, then changing stations on the Metropolitan line to South Kensington is another good 20 minutes quick as train can take you. Arriving at South Kensington yesterday with the violins found great preparations going on. They are making a huge subway or tunnel from the station up to the Exhibition, along Station Road right down Exhibition Road into the thing itself. The affair will cost many thousands of pounds. When I got to the exhibition I found all confusion. Engines

here and there, rail to take goods from one part to another, it is a vast size, and after hunting about amongst a perfect maze of cases and bales of goods all not yet unwrapped or placed in position, I found the official concerned in the musical department and very short and sharp is the imprimatur you get I can assure you. I was directed to the central gallery or music room as they call it. This way through numerous buildings and through the grounds, I should never have found it, but for the kindness of one of the men connected with the affair. Arriving in the room I looked out for your allotment and found the space marked on the floor in black paint, but no case or stand has put in its appearance yet.

You will be astonished at this but do not in any way fear, To leave the violins on the floor, would have been throwing them away; having cases being moved about would have smashed them up in a second, so hunting up another official, I found his advice was "take them home again and bring them on the 28th inst, but no later, the stand then will be in position," so with thanks to him I put the violins under my arm and returned as I came.

There are thousands of men at work ; here part of an engine, there part of a cannon, marine engines, shafting and machines of tons weight ; the noise going on is something wonderful. So I will take the violins for you on the 28th and deposit them in the Exhibition. So trust this hasty explanation will give you some idea of it."

From Montrose Villa, St. Boniface Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight. Mr. Askew's friend says, "I am pleased to inform you that the violins are now placed in position in their case at South Kensington. It has been hard work to get them ready in time, we were very busy up to Friday evening. I sent my son with the case-maker in a cart, and when they arrived at the gates they found hundreds of others all waiting their turn. They had to wait two hours before they could get in. They found all the cases up but yours. The case next to yours the man had taken up part of your room no doubt thinking yours were not coming, however, he soon had to shift as there was the dim outline on the floor. I thought I would just give you a line as I know you would be anxious,"

November 12th, 1885, "At last after much

trouble I have the violins safe. I engaged a warehouseman yesterday to go and take down the case and bring the lot away. He went at eleven in the morning." The writer says he did not get in until about 4 o'clock, and he mentions about some of the strings being off; the writer then says, "I rather fancy that whosoever was the judge of the violins, might have put their own strings on and then taken them off, because I remember when my friend from the Italian Opera (Signor Arditi) tried the instruments at my house, previous to going to the Exhibition, he said at once these strings and fittings" (would be against the instruments) "that are otherwise splendid."

In another letter referring to the great trouble in waiting, etc., he says, "yet I do not begrudge it in the least, and have done it all cheerfully, and feel amply repaid now that I know you have the medal. This is a great thing, I can assure you, considering the splendid show of instruments from London and other makers, that have not got even mentioned. Well, I am astonished, and must say there must be great merit in your work. You ought to take advantage of this and

make money. Can't you send them to Newcastle with medal—think it over. Do not part with these fiddles to any one unless you get good value."

In another letter his London friend thought Askew should advertise in the "Musical Times," published by Novello, Berners St., W. "Respecting making and repairing I send you part of Dawkin's catalogue. They will send you anything you want—I got poor James Benson the last wood he used from this house."

Chapter IX.

LETTERS AND LAST DAYS.

With the exception of Mr. DeLacy's letters, there are very few left amongst Mr. Askew's papers that are of much importance, but in a few cases we get a side-light reference either to the maker or his instruments. The following letter gives us an appreciation of Mr. Askew from an out-sider, and a brother in the leather craft.

In August, 1885, Mr. DeLacy was at Windermere in the lake district, and he had been telling his friend about our fiddle-maker and his fiddles. This friend was very much interested and took it upon him to write Askew from the Commercial Hotel, Bowness, on the 18th of August. Mr. DeLacy had left that morning for Scarborough, so his friend in the quiet and secluded hotel of the lakes penned the following letter :—

“Dear Sir,—Mr. DeLacy was speaking to me last week about you and your violins and as I have for some years taken a very great interest in all pertaining to violins, and as I have for over fifty years been amongst the leather myself (Saddler, Harness, and Shoe business), you may be sure I should feel at least a curiosity if not an interest in a fiddle-making shoemaker. I did think I might be able to give you a call on my way to London but I am afraid I cannot, and am afraid I shall not get back in time to see the Exhibition, but I suppose I might see your violins at DeLacy’s.”

The writer then informs our fiddle-maker how his two boys were robbed of two fiddles in London, worth fifty pounds, and that they

had now to perform on inferior instruments, and further intimates that when he gets to London he intends to open a music shop, and thought that he might sell some of the Askew violins.

The following two brief letters refer to the two exhibitions, 1885 and 1887 :—

International Inventions Exhibition, London,
1885.

South Kensington, S.W.,

March 18th, 1886.

Dear Sir,

I am instructed by the Secretary to the Jury Commission to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, dated 16th March, and to inform you that the Bronze Medal awarded to you will be sent shortly. I have made every enquiry with regard to your violin bow, but, I regret to say that it has not been traced.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

W. E. MATCHWICK.

J. Askew, Esq.

Newcastle-on-Tyne Royal Mining Engineering and Industrial
Exhibition (International and Colonial),
Jubilee Year, 1887.

16, Market Street,
Newcastle-on-Tyne,
15th August, 1888.

Dear Sir,

I beg to advise you that I have this day
forwarded to your address, per parcels post,
the Certificate which you were awarded in
the Artisans' Section of the above Exhibition.

I am, yours faithfully,
N. STRZELECKI,
Acting Secretary.

Mr. John Askew,
Stanhope, Darlington.

Our violin-maker used to send his violins
to various places to get them tested.
Evidently the late Mr. Joseph Roddam,
Violinist, previously mentioned, had some
of Askew's fiddles according to the following
letter ;—

Newcastle-on-Tyne,

April 16th, 1887.

Mr. John Askew, Stanhope,

My Dear Sir,

I should be very glad to see you here on Monday at the time named, and will go up to Mr. Ainsworth's afterwards.

I like the violin last tried very much.

Yours truly,

JOSEPH RODDAM.

* * * *

Letter sent to Mr. W. H. T. Maddison,
Darlington (copy).

Stanhope, October 24th, 1890.

Dear Mr. Maddison,

Should you have a little time to spare when you are first at Stanhope, I should like you to see a violin I have got lately; it is very old, but by what maker I am unable to say. It has a Nicola Amati* ticket inside date 169—something, but of course that is wrong, as Hart says in his book that he died in the year 1684.

* See page 36.

It has seen a good deal of hard usage, the belly having been cracked in several places, but has been most beautifully repaired the edges of the belly have all been most artistically repaired.

It has a magnificent tone. I am getting a new set of strings for it, trusting to see you soon.

I am, Dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,

JNO. ASKEW.

* * * *

The Lindens, Darlington,

July 10th, 1891.

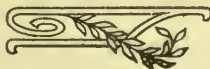
Dear Sir,

I enclose cheque for £5, and will keep the violin till you finish the one you have in hand unless you should require it soon.

W. H. F. MADDISON.

Mr. J. Askew,

Stanhope.



LAST DAYS.

Mr. Albert Smith, Violinist, in a letter dated May 30th, 1913, writes as follows of his friendship and connection with John Askew. He had for some time one of Mr. Askew's medal violins—

“He was a very clever man, and I had the pleasure of knowing him well. He told me that he made all his violins with the use of his cobbler's knife, and even put the purfling in with it. His workmanship was a masterpiece and his modelling perfection.

I well remember the evening before he died when I called to see him for the last time.

The shades of evening were setting in, as I climbed up the old stair-case to his bedroom to try and cheer him for the last time as I knew well. I remember his glad but deathly look at me when I entered his bedroom. We talked together for a little while about the wonders and beauties of the old violin-makers, and he loved to hear me tell him of what I knew and of some of the great violinists I had heard.

His eyes were full of excitement and wonder and I told him that his violins would one day rank as very beautiful specimens of what he had done to try and advance the Art of violin-making.

He then asked me to play on a very good violin I had with me at the time, and then he asked me to play on his, so that he could judge the difference of tone, etc.

It was very sad to see him listening to the strains as I played to him as I knew it was the last music in this world he would ever hear, and Oh! how he listened and looked and wondered.

I did not want to play but he said he must hear music again before he left on his new journey, and asked me to play one or two things over for him again which I did.

Poor fellow; he could not play himself and to him to hear someone playing his own violin was no doubt a great pleasure as you can understand.

It was, with a sad heart, I left the room, and I can now see in my mind very clearly the great modern violin-maker 'John Askew' with that unmistakeable feature written in his face—death.

His wife afterwards told me that the hours he spent that evening made him very happy, and he talked to himself about my playing and at last passed peacefully away."

Chapter X.

THE COMING OF THE VIOLIN.

In writing a sketch of our violin-maker it may be interesting to consider the late coming of the violin to this country. At a very early period we find in England that Kings, Bishops, and the nobility had attendants to amuse the royal courts and palaces, by singing or chanting, and by playing on wind or stringed instruments of various kinds. The pipe and flute, harp and viol were amongst the instruments used by these attendants who were called "Minstrels." Passing early days we find that Traillefer, the celebrated minstrel, came into this country with William of Normandy, and since those days a similar attendant can be traced in the higher courts of Kings and palaces for hundreds of years. John Absolon was minstrel

to King Edward III., in 1370, at 7½d. a day, but history does not record whether this royal person had his minstrel with him when his majesty and his army encamped in Stanhope Park, Weardale, in the County of Durham, in 1327. When the Bishop of Durham, Robert de Insula (1274—1283), and my Lord Prior, Richard Claxton, went to London to interview King Edward the First, we find that on three successive days the Bishop tipped the King's Minstrels in the sums of three, four and five shillings respectively. In Bishop Fordham's time, 1381-1388 we find in the Durham exchequer rolls—"paid to John Dogger of Durham for a horse for Giliot, my Lord's minstrel, by my Lord's orders, 17/6." Amongst the stringed instruments used by these court officials, the viol, in later days, became very popular, and, in its own time, developed into the present day violin. This, admittedly perfect stringed instrument, was, nevertheless, late in coming to England through English makers. Mr. Hart in his book on violins refers to two foreign books on this instrument, and published respectively in 1825 and 1848, as not mentioning any English violin-makers.

In Hyacinth Abele's book—"The Violin and its Story," written in the sixties of last century, and translated by Geoffrey Alwyn, 1905, we find the following—"There is in England no special stringed instrument manufacturer. Most of the instruments sold in England are brought over from Mittenwald, from Mirecourt, and from Markneukirchen. They are often very carefully finished in England, fitted with new necks, varnished, and then sold at an augmented price." Whilst admitting there were many good repairers in England, the author states "that London may be regarded as the best market in the world for old and valuable violins," p. 65. In "Old Violins," by the Rev. H. R. Haweis, 1910, we find it stated that Mirecourt in Lorraine, was associated from so early a date as 1566, with Cremona, and that there was a worshipful Guild of Violin-makers of Markneukirchen dating from 1677, and that Mittenwald shared, with the above two places, "the honour of supplying that rapidly growing violin market which was now springing up, and whilst Cremona made largely for home consumption and a few foreign courts, Mirecourt undertook the more modest but

equally useful duty of multiplying Cremona school violins, which circulated far and wide throughout the provinces, and frequently reached our own shores ; indeed fiddles often passed for Cremonas,"—p. 187.

The English fiddle-maker, nevertheless came, Mr. Hart mentions Jacob Rayman, London, who was at Blackman Street, Southwark, in 1641, and at the "Bell" in Southwark, in 1648, and is of opinion that this Rayman, who was probably a German from the Tyrol who settled in England about the year 1620, may be considered as the founder of violin-making in this country, there being no trace of any other British makers at this time. In Thomas Britton's collection of instruments there were labels inscribed—"Jacob Rayman, dwelling in Blackman Street, Long Southwark, 1641, and "Jacob Rayman at the 'Ye Bell' yard in Southwark, London, 1648." These are the dates mentioned above. Amongst other early English violin-makers we find Christopher Wise, London, flourished about 1650, who made viols and violins, label—"Christopher Wise, in Half Moon Alley, without Bishopsgate, London, 1656." Wise is called a transition maker—

viols to violins. An undoubtedly genuine violin made by Wise (1656), is, says Morris, on the Maggini lines. William Addison, London 1650-1975), and Thos. Cole (1670-1690) made viols, but it is not quite certain that they made violins. Richard Meares (1680), adopted the Brescian model and made some excellent violins on the lines of Maggini. Thomas Urquhart, violin-maker, from 1648 to 1680, and who is generally supposed to have been a Scotsman, but all his violins were made at London Bridge. His violins were of two sizes, and various writers say that Urquhart's varnish was supposed to have been equal to the Italian. Barak Norman, London, 1688-1740, is set down as amongst the best of the Old English School of violin-makers. He is supposed to have followed on the lines of Urquhart. Norman lived first in Bishopsgate, and then in St. Paul's Churchyard. A violin made by Norman in 1718 was valued at 15 guineas. He entered into partnership with Nathaniel Cross two years after the date of this violin. Edward Pamphilon was also a violin-maker at the great aristocratic fiddle-makers' centre, London Bridge, about 1670-90. His violins

were formerly much prized. "Edward Pamphilon, April the 3rd, 1685," is from a label. His work was considered good and he used an excellent varnish. Peter Wamsley, born 1715, may be said to have ushered in the eighteenth century makers, and he made his fiddles at "Ye Golden Harp, in Picadilly, London," and afterwards at the "Harp and Hautboy." But we must turn back to the time when, alas, the rise of the Commonwealth had a tendency to bannish music from Church and Chapel and private houses in England. Historians tell us that it was the stern Puritan, especially the Scotch Presbyterians who objected to musical instruments, and called the organ a "kist o' whissles." At this time the psalm tune was about all that was tolerated, but the hope and wish of musicians loomed in the distance.

At the Restoration a great change took place. The Royalists were not simply very musical, but very merry and all the more so to mark their contempt of the Puritans. Instrumental music now became popular, and it was introduced into Church and Chapel, and Charles II. established his royal band of twenty-four fiddlers, in the Royal Chapel, in

imitation of Louis the XIV., of France. Pepys, in his inimitable diary, mentions that at the Coronation of Charles II., on the 23rd April, 1661, he went to the Abbey at a very early hour and says—"a great pleasure it was to see the Abbey raised in the middle, all covered with red, and a throne (that is a chaire) and foot stoole on the top of it; all the officers of all kinds, so much as the very fiddlers in red vests." Here we have it on good authority that the King's fiddlers wore red waistcoats. Pepys further says—"I took a great deal of pleasure to go up and down, and look upon the ladies, and to hear the musique of all sorts, but above all, the 24 violins."

At this transition period viol-makers turned their attention to making violins, and naturally the popularity of the violin created more violinists.

The name of Leonardo da Vinci, who died in 1523 is supposed to have been a noted violinist, also Claudio Monteverde, a Cremonese who was composer and violinist. But Hart says, "the earliest player on the violin, of whom we have any account worthy of attention, was Baltazarini, a native of

Piedmont. He removed to France in the year 1577, whither he was sent by Marshal de Brissac, to superintend the music of Catherine de Medici."— p. 377.

Associated with our English Courts mention is made of some early violinist.

Thomas Lupo, the younger, who flourished in 1598-1641, was one of Queen Elizabeth's violins, and was a member of Prince Henry's band in 1610.

Thomas Baltzar (1630-1663) violinist, born at Lubeck, settled in England, 1656, and became famous, being appointed a leader in Charles II.'s band, and was regarded as the best player of his time.

Then we find Davis Mell, who flourished in 1650, a musician to the Court of Charles I. and was considered the first violinist in England. He was entertained at Oxford in 1658, and in 1660 became a leader in Charles II's band. He was a composer, and some of his compositions were contained in Simpson's "Division Violin," 1684.

John Banister (1630-1679), born at Westminster, whose violin-playing attracted the attention of Charles II. so much that His Majesty sent him to France to study, and on

his return in 1663 he was made leader of the King's band. According to the warrant-books of the time of King Charles as mentioned by Forster and Sandy, on a warrant dated October 24th, 1662, John Banister was paid forty-two pounds for two Cremona violins by him bought and delivered for His Majesty's service. Amongst other royal musicians, at this time, was Nicola Matteis, a popular violinist living in London, 1670.

So far as England is concerned, Hart says—"It is gratifying to learn that, even in the primitive age of violin-playing we were not without our national composers for the instrument," and mentions "Dr. Benjamin Rogers as writing airs in four parts for violin so early as 1653." Dr. Rogers was Mus. Doc. Oxford, and was born at Windsor, 1614, and died at Oxford, 1698.

John Jenkins, 1592-1678, however, is said to have been the earliest English composer of instrumental music, and in 1660 published "twelve Sonatas" for two violins and a Bass.

Matthew Locke was a great musician, being created composer in ordinary to Charles II. in 1661,

A few years later we find in Pepy's diary under October 18th, 1667, the following :—
"To White Hall, and there in the boarded gallery did hear the musick with which the King is presented this night by Monsieur Grebur, the master of his musick—both instrumental (I think twenty-four violins) and vocall."

Various musical entertainments were about this time established in London.

The first public subscription concert was performed at Oxford, in 1665; and the first in London is said to have been in 1672. About this time, 1678, Thomas Britton, known as—"The musical small-coals man," from his selling small coals in Clerkenwell—established over his shop in Aylesbury Street, a musical club, and though the room was low and small and was approached by dangerous backstairs, his concerts of vocal and instrumental music became a great success. These concerts took place every Thursday and were attended by all the great musicians of the day, including amongst the performers the celebrated musician Handel. This club played a considerable part in making music popular. Tom Britton was a good musician, a collector

of books, and in every way a gentleman as set forth in the following lines by Prior :—

Though doomed to small-coal, yet to arts allied,
Rich without wealth, and famous without pride,
Music's best patron, judge of books and men,
Beloved and honoured by Apollo's Train.
In Greece or Rome, sure never did appear,
So bright a genius in so dark a sphere !
More of the man had probably been saved
Had Kneller painted, and had Vertue graved.

Sadler's Wells, 1682, called after Mr. Sadler. who built an orchestra to entertain the invalids who used the waters medicinally became a popular rendezvous for musicians. Nancy Dawson was figure dancer here, and joining the Covent Garden Theatre in 1759, made a reputation by dancing the hornpipe in the Beggar's Opera.

From the time of Charles II. to the early part of the 18th century it will be seen that the English violin-maker had come to stay, and equally so the composer of music for this instrument whilst we find many popular violinists. Having glanced at the "Coming of the Violin," the writer may say that it is not within the province of this little book to deal with the host of violinists and musicians which indelibly mark the 17th and 18th centuries.

Chapter XI.

THE FIDDLE IN THE NORTH.

“To Westminster; on the way, meeting many milkmaids with their garlands upon their pails, dancing with a fiddler before them.”—*Pepy's Diary*, May 1, 1667.

At the time when Charles the Second's twenty-four fiddlers were so popular, and when Pepy's milk-maids with their garlands and pails danced along Westminster to the strains of the fiddle we evidently had a popular violinist in Weardale, according to the Stanhope Parish registers.* Cuthbert Emmerson, who was buried on the second of March, 1697, was denominated *Fidler* in the register, and in all probability he was a popular violinist in 1660. There were at least three other Weardale violinists at about the

*1697—Cuthbert Emmerson, FIDLER, buried March ye 2nd.

1703—Jan. 31, Thos. son of Thomas Dixon, FIDLER, in Stanhope, baptised

1709—Nov. 10, Joseph, son of Thomas Dixon, FIDLER, baptised

1714—July 18, Jane, daughter of Wm. Portas, FIDLER do.

same time or a few years later. Thos, Dixon, *Fidler*, had a son Thomas, baptised at Stanhope in January, 1703, and six years later another son in November, and in the year 1714, Jo. Portas and Wm. Farlas had children baptised. At a later date we have a good representative of Scotland, in Neil Gow, born 1727, the famous Scottish violinist, who was patronised by the Duke of Atholl, and played at fashionable gatherings, hornpipes and strathspeys. He was famous as a composer, and for some of his compositions Burns wrote words. His son, Nathaniel, who was composer and violinist, published two hundred original melodies. Where our Weardale violinists, Emerson and Dixon, got their violins it would be difficult to say. In Honeyman's "Scottish Violin-Makers,"—a list of over a hundred names—there are no fiddle-makers mentioned earlier than Thos. Urquhart, who is supposed to have been born 1625, and made violins from 1648 till about 1680, but all his violins were made in London. Emerson's violin was not likely to have been a Cremona, as the wandering pedlar and connoisseur, Tarisio, had not yet introduced his Italian gems to France and England.

No doubt the fiddle was in general use in the latter half of the 17th century in the North of England. According to the accounts of Gilesgate, Durham, they had fiddle-music when they rode the boundary of the parish, to wit—"1687, given to ye drummers and ye fiddlers, 6/-" If we look back to the early part of the 18th century we find the fiddle the principal instrument used by musicians in the northern dales of Teesdale, Weardale and Allendale. Long before the iron road—the railway—penetrated the quiet pent-up dales and cheap excursions were an unknown pleasure, the people were, by circumstances if not by choice, stay-at-home folks, but notwithstanding this there were great opportunities for the people enjoying themselves in their own way. Social life in those days was bound up or entertained with religious contentment. The house-wife was busy carding her wool or standing by the side of her spinning wheel on the kitchen floor. The local weavers were here and there at work at their own homes, in various parts of the dales, and the tailors with lap-board and goose repaired to people's homes and made the men folk their home-spun suits on a diet of pease-pudding and bacon.

Riding weddings were great events in those early times [for the up-bye people and were very largely attended. They were called this name on account of the bride and bridegroom, and all the invited young folk often to twenty couples, riding on horse-back to Stanhope Church. There were many old customs and folk-lore sayings at those gatherings which we need not refer to except that the rider, man or woman, who, on the return journey reached the bride's house first was awarded a blue ribbon, a trophy which the winner was proud to wear during the evening when fiddling and dancing were indulged in until a late hour. On those occasions the fiddler was an important person; horn-pipes, reels, and jigs were the principal class of music on all these occasions and many young men and women became expert dancers in their own way.

The popularity of riding weddings is shewn in the following incident. A servant girl who lived at Bent Head, in the highest part of Weardale was invited to a wedding which was to take place in Harwood, in Teesdale. On the day before the event the young woman set off to cross the fell into

Harwood, but it being misty lost her way, and travelled the moors all night: at day-break she found her way to a house, the highest house in Burnhope, but it was on the wrong side of the mountain, however, the daunted girl took another point over the fell and at last reached the bride's home in Harwood, but the wedding folks had left for Middleton-in-Teesdale, seven or eight miles down the Tees valley, and where the wedding was to take place. Though wet and fatigued the spirited girl mounted her pony and galloped off at full speed and overtook the party just as they were about to enter the Church at Middleton.

At Christmas time there were great doings in the dales, one of the entertainments was what was called "sword dancing," but it was not a regular Christmas entertainment as it took some time to prepare a troupe of performers. The late Mr. W. Henderson, when preparing his fascinating book on the Folklore of the Northern Counties,* tells us that he had the good fortune to meet one Joseph Brown, a pitman of Houghton-le-Spring, who

* "Notes on the Folk Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders."—by Wm. Henderson, London, 1866.

had acted as a sword dancer for the past twelve years. He stated to Mr. Henderson that nine was the number of performers necessary to perform the evolutions in carrying out the sword dancing programme ; five were dancers, one baggage man, two were clowns, and one a fiddler. Sometimes the pitmen dancers came into the dales, and on such occasions they all wore special dresses decorated with coloured ribbons. The dancers each had a double-handled sword, wore black breeches with red stripes at the sides, white shirts and their hats were decorated with streamers.

Chapel Fair, was held in July and was called the summer fair and all the girls who attended were dressed in white. Young men and women came to this fair from the neighbouring dales. It was customary for every young man to buy his sweet-heart a "fairing." Fiddling and dancing were indulged in at all the long-rooms belonging to the several Public Houses until a late hour at this once popular fair.

The Weardale lead miners "pays" was also a great event.

At the Beaumont mines the miners got monthly payments called "lent-money," and at the year's end the accounts between miners or their partnerships were squared up with their employer. The "pays" were held at Newhouse where the Beaumont offices were situated and the agents used to erect booths at this place for all the publicans in the upper part of the dale. These booths or tents were made of wood boarding, and covered with canvas; the front was open, and at the other end a spirit bar of wood was erected.

Perhaps a dozen of these tents were used and they displayed public house signs, for instance, a "fox brush" used to be stuck up on one tent, the original sign at home being the "hare and hounds." The "pays" were held on Thursday and Friday, at Newhouse, and all the millers, grocers, doctors, and tradesmen attended, as well as jewellers, Hexham hatters, and Yorkshire blanket-men. On Saturday the people had a closing gathering at St. John's Chapel where pots of toddy and fiddling and dancing were exploited in every public house.

In winter time there were held at various

houses on the hill sides or in the valley, gatherings known as merry-nights ; quilting nights ; tom-trot-nights. All these were associated with fiddling and dancing, Merry nights were got up by the young men for the purpose of a benefit for some poor widow.

Quilting-nights were a gathering of young women, who went to help their host in the afternoon to make quilts then, after tea, their sweet-hearts turned up and the night was finished with fiddling and dancing. A "tom-trot" was a night set apart for young men and their sweet-hearts to meet at a neighbour's house, when the young men made a collection for the purpose of buying treacle, if it arrived safely the good wife assisted by the young ladies, set to work to boil the treacle and make it into long rolls of a toffy-like substance, which was broken into lengths and made into parcels, and each one present got a parcel of tom-trot. Dancing and fiddling closed the night.

Richard Holmes, born at Cotherstone a hundred years ago, was said to be the father of the 18th century dales fiddlers. When his father died Richard got his fiddle,

Richard came to reside in Weardale, and married a girl named Little. He was contemporary with John Dunn, and Wallace, the cockfighters. Richard was a regular attender at all the fairs, markets, weddings, &c., in the dales. Once when at Wolsingham fair, and was returning home at a late hour with his fiddle in a green bag, he took fright when at the west end of Wolsingham, thinking someone was going to rob him so he hid himself under a low arch over a runner of water, and thus saved himself. That little bridge is called to this day "Fiddler's Brig." Richard Holmes died in 1812, aged 77 years.

When Methodism was introduced into the dales under Wesley, we find mention of an early convert who played the fiddle. The story of the praying people came into Weardale in 1745. In 1748, Christopher Hopper came over from Allendale to preach the Gospel. Hopper preached in private houses, ale houses, cockpits, &c. Then J. Rowell and Matthew Lowes came into the dale. Rowell, when converted was returning from a cockfight. Lowes converted in the revival of 1772 left off card playing, dancing, and fiddling, and put away his gun. Like

Cromwell's dictum, the fiddle under the new religion was not approved, but in later years it became a most prominent instrument in Church and Chapel Choirs in the dales.

In closing these pages the writer must take leave of the king of instruments, the violin, which, being the well to do musician's treasure has always been the poor man's friend. The great Tarisio when collecting his Italian violins frequently played on his fiddle in the villages, and accepted alms from the people. In the north of England and Scotland, and also in London we find the travelling or itinerant musician attending fairs and such gatherings. Pepys gives a good incident in his diary, May 8th, 1661, the diarist say:—"To-day I received a letter from my uncle, to buy an old fiddle of me, for Perkin, the miller, whose mill the wind hath lately broke down, and now he hath nothing to live on but fiddling, and he must need have it against Whitsuntide, to play to the country girls; but it vexed me to see how my uncle writes to me, as if he were not able to buy him one; but I intend to-morrow to send him one."

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